The COMING BACK of LAURENCE AVERIL

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"THE FELLOWS AT THE OARS WAXED FEARFUL AND UTTERED DIRE WARNINGS."

The Coming Back of Laurence Averil

BY

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New York

Edward J. Clode

Publisher

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CHAPTER I

A RISING full moon, the earliest of young summer, lingered yet behind the black turrets of Dover Castle, sending between them long fingers of light upon the twilit peace of the harbor below.

Beneath it to seaward the intermittent flash—flash—flash of the South Foreland light wheeled regularly upon a wisp of pale sea mist, that faded and vanished as though the giant beam had wiped it from existence. Upon the sheer face of the chalk chance prominences here and there caught the growing moonlight, the shadows between them making of the cliffs a mighty fairy lacework of frosted silver upon deep dark blue. In its little valley the town lay almost silent, its sea front checkered with lighted windows and strung with beads of light, dependent in long catenaries from lamp to lamp along the promenade. Touched by the moonlight, the trident of piers stretched whitely forth over the still cliff-shadowed waters, their ends dimly illuminate at monotonously cadenced intervals with a sickly light that waxed and waned as the great green lantern revolved

slowly around the masthead of the harbor works light-vessel.

Beyond, in the narrow straits, threaded with silent traffic, outward and homeward bound vessels announced arrival or de-

parture by high-flung rockets or the blue-white deck flares, disposed after set fashion, fore, aft, or amidships, in the night speech of the sea.

Between the swift-shifting traffic and the cliff shore a little cutter-rigged yacht, her sails ghost-white in the eerie 'tween lights, glided slowly and silently on the last soft air from seaward towards the harbor mouth.

The head and guernseyed shoulders of a man protruded from the square hatch of her forepeak, smoke from his pipe drifting aloft in irresolute spirals. On the deck aft by the tiny steering-well another figure lay recumbent, bare arms crossed behind head, bare legs hanging overside towards the cool water drifting slowly by. A third man sat in the steering-well, the tiller beneath his elbow. He glanced aloft at the scarcely drawing sails, then over at the gliding water alongside, and stifled a yawn.

"Whee-ew, whee-ew," he whistled softly. "Scarcely a breath, Pat."

The man addressed turned lazily over upon his elbow and then sat bolt upright. The light showed him merry of face, with curly hair and twinkling gray eyes.

"Always the way with this old tub," he said, stretching himself. "Either you get wind enough to blow the sticks out of her, or else it's dead flat calms. If I weren't a weak-kneed, easily persuaded idiot, Laurence, I'd ha' shipped on a luckier packet 'fore now."

Laurence Averil laughed. Dark-skinned and lithe, he had the clear-cut features generally termed "aristocratic" by people who have but the vaguest notion of the meaning of the word.

"Nobody else 'ud have you," he said.

"You're no good in a boat, you lazy lawyer."

"Lawyer be—blowed! I'm a true sailor, every hair a rope yarn and every drop of blood in my veins pure Stockholm tar. At least, I only want to learn to 'hand, reef and steer, and ship a selvagee.' I've got a wife in every port we call at already, and that's the prime necessity, as everybody knows. Now there, ashore"—he waved his arm towards the slowly nearing harbor lights—"there's the dearest girl of all girls that ever lived. The only girl I ever really loved, she is, and if I'd been on any boat but this driftin' old raft I'd have been basking in the light of her smiles these two hours past. What's time now?"

As if to answer him, a little yacht's clock in the cabin struck sharply, "ting-ting."

"Two bells—nine o'clock—and the pubs shut at eleven, and we shan't be in for another half-hour at this rate."

"Pubs?" Averil queried. "What about the only girl you ever loved, then?"

"She's in one, you simple-minded blighter. Shouldn't love her half so much else. She's in the Badminton, and I'm going to rush for a Scotch and soda dispensed by her fair hands before I'm much older. I chucked our last soda-water bottle overboard passing the

South Sands lightship. If I'd known how long it would be before I got another, I'd have put in a farewell message to pa and ma to tell 'em I was about to die of thirst upon the high seas, too."

"And to the only girl you ever loved as well?"

"My faith! If I was to start writing farewell messages to all the 'only girls' I've ever loved—and lost, drat 'em all, the fickle, freckled jades—I should be at it for weeks, till even you got tired of playing at Vanderdecken in the Straits of Dover. I'll bring you a wind, if whistling'll do it."

He whistled shrilly through his teeth. A dull catspaw rippled the surface of the water as the night breeze came down the valley off the land.

"There you are. What would you do without me, you sucking financier?"

"Jib sheets," Averil called, and the man forward, leaping on deck, flattened the loose headsails as the breeze—sweet with suggestion of hayfields ashore—reached the little vessel. She heeled to it, coming round with a graceful sweep; the soft ripple of water along her sides became a rising hiss, and the skeleton pier works to the right began to slide rapidly past between them and the lighted town.

The piers foreshortened, became end on, and the harbor entrance opened; but Laurence Averil stood on his course until they were well astern. Then at his cry of "Lee oh!" the yacht flew up into the wind in answer to the depressed tiller, her sails, released from pressure, shaking and flapping briskly. Pat Dwyer, his laziness vanished, tumbled anyhow into the steering well, throwing loose the taut jib sheet and hauling rapidly on the other as he did so. The man forward cleared the heel of the jib over the staysail, and the boat was about, curtseying lightly as she gathered way into the harbor.

"Goes about like a top," her owner said proudly.

"Gar'n." Dwyer mocked him. "One idea'd old cuckoo, you are. Now there's that very thing—going about. In your darned twopenny-ha'penny old tub going about quickly's a virtue. Whereas if I hint that I too can enjoy going off on a fresh course, then I'm a Reuben, unstable as water, and I shall not excel." His voice took on the sing-song whine that in some quarters is considered a truly religious adjunct to quotations from Scripture. "Here's the harbor at last. Luxon, ahoy!"

"Sir," came from forward.

"When we're anchored I want you ready

to put me ashore—for letters." The man's grin was hidden behind the mast. "I am expecting urgent business letters here, and delay might prove to be fatal. Then you will return and help Mr. Averil snug down for the night. I will now go below and array myself—to meet the Dover post-master."

He dived into the little cabin. Laurence Averil stooped his head and spoke feelingly.

"You've a cheek of ringing brass, if you like, Pat Dwyer. Aren't you going to help stow sails?"

"I am not, dear one. The mariner from toil released will joyously carouse ashore. If you'd come I'd wait for you, but you won't. You'll tidy up your beloved boat, and then you will gracefully recline on deck and survey the peaceful scene, uplifting your great soul to meet the moonshine—to which, methinks, it is somewhat akin. You will also endeavor to detect the smell of roses on the balmy night air, and kid yourself you have a poet's mind attuned to all sweet nature. I haven't any soul at all. I've got a great and consuming thirst that I wouldn't sell for half a quid, and I'm going ashore to do it justice."

"There's whisky on board," Laurence grumbled. "Don't see why you want to go ashore."

"A quarter of a bottle—and no soda. Wah, great chief, the heart of the paleface is downcast because of the shortage in the commissariat." He emerged from the cabin, struggling with a recalcitrant collar stud. "Besides, is whisky all? What of Love, my poet? I want to bask in the smiles of Cissie at the Badminton—unless she's got the sack by this time. Perhaps she has, alas! Haven't seen her since last September. Ah me! 'Tis a world of fleeting glories. Never mind. Dare say if she's gone there'll be somebody there who'll listen to the outpourings of a virgin heart. When are you going to anchor?"

"Now, and here." He raised his voice. "Anchor, Luxon." The chain slid out with a rattle and whirr. "Get the topsail off her."

Dwyer protested. "Am I to wait till you've got the sails stowed?"

"Can't leave her like this. We'll get the mainsail and topsail down and then you can go. I'll get in the headsails myself. Why not get the Berthon overside meanwhile?" Aided by the man, he set himself to lower away the mainsail, while Dwyer dragged a shapeless crumple of iron and canvas from off the deck into the water, where it floated hazardously. Holding by the main rigging,

he jumped up and down upon the folded bottom boards that projected from its center until the deeply wrinkled mass flipped outwards from under his feet into the semblance of a clumsy boat. Making her fast, he scrambled on deck, threw paddles and rowlocks into her, and went below to assume his coat.

When he came on deck again the mainsail lay along the boom, strapped by wide canvas tiebands into a shapely roll, and the yachtsman knelt by the bulwarks to steady the dinghy as he stepped down into her.

"Matches and bread. Is that all we want, Laurence?" he asked.

"Any of your stores short, Luxon?"

"Oil's rayther low, sir."

"Bother! Stinking stuff! Chuck the tin in, then. I've got her." He held to the yacht's rigging while the man fetched the can. "You can see to the marketing when we get ashore and bring the stuff back with you now. I shall be down at eleven. That suit you, Laurence?"

Averil nodded. "Ay," he assented, busying himself with the waterproof cover of the mainsail. "Keep sober, and don't let any of your girls run away with you."

"'Twill be a struggle. Push off, Luxon." The boat, impelled by short choppy strokes, jerked its way like a great water-beetle to-

wards the pier, Dwyer sitting, knees and nose together, in her stern.

Left to himself, Laurence Averil finished covering the mainsail, and then, going forward, lowered jib and staysail. Following on the heat of the day, the dew was heavy and the sails too wet for stowing. So, arranging them on the foredeck to dry in the coming morning's sun, he went below, lighted a lamp, and, filling his pipe, sat down upon one of the narrow cabin lockers that served as seats by day and beds by night. Being short of matches, he used a spill of paper, torn from an old and crumpled letter, to light his pipe. Half the sheet remained, and he re-read it by the light of the swinging lamp. "Should always have wished myself," the last sentence from the destroyed page concluded, and then went on:

"You know, my boy, that although there is no probability of the necessity ever arising for you to earn your own living, it has always been my desire that you should attach yourself to a profession. I need not remind you of the disadvantages of idleness. Perhaps I am inclined to lay undue stress upon this, but you must remember that my position as well as your own is entirely due to a lifetime of severe application and unweary-

ing perseverance. I am happy to say that you have never given me any anxiety whatever. Even during these past two years, during which your lack of definite occupation might well have thrown you into any of the temptations that beset the path of a young man, I have no reason to be anything but proud of your temperate habit of life, but I would nevertheless again urge upon you the desirability of choosing a profession. You already know my own wish that you should be called to the Bar, but that choice I wish to leave unreservedly in your own hands, and am, my dear Laurence, always your affectionate father,

"HERMAN AVERIL."

He turned the scrap of paper over and over in his hands. "Ye-es, I suppose it'll be the Bar," he said to himself. "Pity I didn't know my own inclinations ten years ago. Then it might have been the Navy. That's the worst of not belonging to a Service family. Heigh-ho!" He tore the letter across and across at its well-worn creases, and, going on deck, tossed the scraps of paper overboard.

The moon was now high, all the harbor softly bathed in its radiance. Against the Admiralty pier the funnels of a cross-channel

boat shone staring white, save where at their bases deck lights tinged them with an added yellow glow. The noise of escaping steam through them, carried by the still water, thrilled the deck on which he stood, and while he watched the boat train crawled upon the pier, its slow pace and the yellow lighted spots upon its sides suggestive of some giant caterpillar. It stopped, and a bustle of embarkation broke out upon the still evening; hurrying steps clattered across the gangways, and the great derricks commenced their swaying work of swinging luggage aboard. A smaller intermediate cargo boat moored alongside boomed a long deep note from her siren that echoed along the cliffs and up the valley behind the town. In the silence that followed it, the sound of descending feet upon the pier-steps was clearly audible, and Luxon came rowing back to the yacht.

Averil caught the painter as he came alongside and took some parcels from him. "Leave the rowlocks and paddles in her," he said. "She'll lie alongside till you fetch Mr. Dwyer"; and then, again going below, he took a volume of Emerson's essays from the little bookshelf and settled down to read.

The book opened at the essay on "Heroism," the first words on which his eyes fell being perhaps the bravest ever written:

"But that which takes my fancy most, in the heroic class, is the good humor and hilarity they exhibit. It is a height to which common duty can very well attain, to suffer and to dare with solemnity. But . . . the great will not condescend to take anything seriously; all must be gay as the song of a canary, though it were the building of cities. . . ."

The words came warmly to him, sharply contrasting as they did with the somewhat sententious note of self-conscious prosperity struck by his father's letter. The sense of contrast was so strong as almost to faintly accuse him of disloyalty. He closed the book, his fingers between its pages, and gazed through the cabin doorway at the lighted harbor, silent in meditation.

The words lingered in his mind. Our English temperament, for all its strength, was too heavy—too dull. It took this fiery American, product of the best of our old race transplanted to the dry and nervous atmosphere of a great new country, to call so clearly to both sides of the emotions of youth, full as they are of yearnings for the great unknown, of joy and laughter in the present hour.

"Gay as the song of a canary—even the building of cities." He pictured for a moment his father's austere life, its sternly un-

varying course, its respectable observance of the services of religion and society, and again the thought of disloyalty arose in him. He sighed, reopened his book, and read on quietly, his mood of contemplation past.

At eleven o'clock Dwyer's hail sounded from the pier, and Luxon's bare feet paddled across the deck. Laurence heard him get into the dinghy and push off, and within two minutes his friend was aboard, noisily pleased with all the world.

"Stuffy old freak," he said, in scorn. "Reading—on a night like this! Having slain my thirst, my soul begins to revive—I've got one, after all, it seems. Here's letters for you—one's a wire." He threw two envelopes across the cabin. "Where's the whisky? I want a nightcap:

> "A grand piano underneath the bough,
> A drop of Scotch, a loaf of bread, and thou
> Beside me singing in the wilderness."

I am moved by the moonlight to poesy—What's wrong, man?"

For Laurence had thrown the telegram upon the table, and with a face of horror was reading the letter.

"The guvnor's dead," he said huskily. "Pat, look at this." He held out the sheet of paper with a shaking hand. "What in the name of Heaven am I to do?"

Dwyer, sobered at once, glanced for a moment at the letter, and then back at his friend, leaning back against the cushions, his face white and terrified. He pushed his own glass over to him.

"Drink this," he commanded sharply, the merriment gone from his voice. "And pull yourself together. Keep a stiff lip, man;" for the first words of the letter had shown him how serious matters were.

The signature was that of Herman Averil's managing clerk—the date two days before.

"DEAR MR. LAURENCE," it ran,—"I hardly know how to write you, we are all so terrified and upset. The telegram will break the news to you somewhat, but it is far worse than that. Your father died by his own hand. He shot himself in the office here. I cannot tell you how horrified and upset we all are, and we fear that business affairs are at the bottom of it—that matters with the firm are not at all as they should be. . . ."

The letter, hastily written, with erasures and smears on every page, was itself a sufficient symptom of violent agitation. Dwyer ran his eye down over its pages, noting a line here and there,—"Trust funds appear to be missing"—"already hints at misappropria-

tion have come to my ears''—and sorrow for his friend made him look up at Laurence again, kindly sympathy in his glance.

''What am I to do?'' was all Laurence could say.

''Drink that whisky first. Drink it, I say,'' —and Averil obeyed in silence. ''Now change into your shore duds and catch the next train to town. There's one at midnight. Where's a time-table?'' He rummaged the bookshelf. ''No, twelve fifteen. Then you'll be on the spot first thing in the morning. Go to my governor before you do anything else. You'll want a lawyer's help in this. The boat? Never mind about her. I'll run her back to the Island and leave Luxon in charge, and skip back to town soon's I can. Now hurry, hurry, hurry,—you've only half an hour.''

He helped Laurence to dress, and sent him off in the dinghy with a warm handclasp of farewell. ''Good-by, old man. Buck up, and pull yourself together. I'll be with you 'fore the end of the week. Good-by.''

He watched him up the pier-steps in the moonlight, and returned to the cabin. The letters and wire still lay on the table. He picked the latter up. ''Your father dangerously ill no hope return at once,'' it read, and Dwyer sat down upon his bunk, the full con-

sciousness of all that this would mean only coming to him slowly.

"Poor old Laurence," he said. "Poor old pal. My word! this means absolute blue ruin for him—the utter smash of all things. He'll be broke to the world; and he's never wanted a penny in his life, and doesn't know how to earn one!"

He shivered, and went to bed.

CHAPTER II

CRUEL as the shock and horror of his father's suicide had been to Laurence Averil, it was as nothing to the shame that followed in the

public unraveling of the dead man's business affairs.

The report of the pistol that had startled his office staff and sent his pale-faced clerks hither and thither to confusedly announce that "Averil's had gone under," and that the apparently prosperous life of the founder of the firm had ended in failure and self-destruction, had been but a prelude to the

common knowledge that the dead man had sunk from legitimate speculation to business actions as shady as the commonest of theft.

Of handsome appearance and suave manner, he had been generally and highly respected. To all appearance, he had been a man of the highest integrity, punctiliously honorable in business affairs, and noted for large and unostentatious charities in his private life. No breath of scandal had ever touched his name. To such men trust is readily accorded, and until the day of his death Herman Averil had enjoyed the trust and respect of all who knew him.

The immense sums he had scattered like chaff in his lately born mania for speculation had in most cases been intrusted to him with but the merest forms of safeguard, and the details of shameless misappropriation of trust funds, of the coldly conceived ruin of hundreds who had trusted him, that transpired in open court after his death, made Laurence hot with shame for his father's memory.

The wretched man had stopped at nothing. Probably the whole history of his financial fall was never brought to light, so skillfully had he covered his track in the earlier months of his failing fortunes. Shameless lies had

concealed shameful theft; crimes had been committed to cover crimes. No less than three forgeries were proved to have been committed by him.

So far as his books and other evidence showed, the firm had done business successfully and honorably until three years before its founder's death. Then some petty Central American revolution had shaken the credit of an engineering association in which Herman Averil had been deeply interested. Even then there had been every opportunity for retrenchment and a profitable carrying on of the business; but, fatally misled by a carelessly worded code telegram, he had plunged deeply in just such a purely speculative affair as he had a thousand times warned his own clients against touching.

The speculation failed, and the man, lacking the courage to own defeat, had deliberately set out to gamble with funds intrusted to him for investment. Once or twice lucky coups brought him to within a few hundred pounds of the financial position he had enjoyed before that unlucky plunge, but the final small speculation needed to gain those hundreds and his lost honor had invariably failed, and he had again and again been condemned to enter the gambling lists for another losing fight with Fate.

He had perhaps one of the clearest, keenest brains in the financial world, and his struggles were magnificent. Thousands of pounds passed through his hands to this speculation or that, scattering, grouping, withdrawn for reinvestment, never for a moment lying idle. It was as though the man felt that it was the last struggle in which he would embark, and he speculated with unparalleled daring, flinging his golden weapons here and there with the masterful skill and the cool, calculating recklessness that makes empires —or destroys them.

But his nerve was gone. Though scarcely a line on his broad white forehead told of the struggle, in his heart was cold, deadly fear—fear of exposure, of any one little slip that should show the world his real position. He had gone, apparently smiling and quiet, to the very execution of forgery, and the crime went unchallenged; but if any of his clients or clerks could have had a moment's glimpse of Herman Averil in his private office after their inspection of his handiwork, it is doubtful whether the onlooker's belief in his merits would not have been severely shaken. Though even when entirely alone the man was calm-eyed and quiet, the refreshment his steady hand conveyed to his firm lips was spirit—raw spirit—and he drank it, in these

his worst hours, as though it were pure water from the brook.

At the last, when detection was inevitable, he had gone to his gun-maker and bought the revolver that was to end his days as calmly as he had gone to church the day before. Not a twitching muscle nor a shake of his voice was perceived by the dealer, who, knowing him well, had hastened personally to serve so highly respected a client.

He had chatted to the man for a while of the prospects of sport in the following autumn; had talked of "My son Laurence's holiday expedition to Damascus"—the ostensible reason for the purchase of the weapon; had been driven to his office in the city; had walked quietly to his own private room, and thence, without as much as a farewell letter to his only son, Herman Averil had gone to his place in eternity.

Inquiry into his affairs showed nothing but confusion—confusion more confounded everywhere as the search proceeded. Misappropriation of trust funds had supplied most of the material for his final two years of reckless gambling, but he had no more confined himself to one means of raising money than he had limited his methods of scattering it again.

He had acted behind the scenes in the flota-

tion of two or three fraudulent companies; one, a barefaced attempt to raise money on a barren patch of useless land in the south of Iceland, as recently as a month before his death.

Even had the name of the dead man appeared on the prospectus, it is more than doubtful if clients would have been found sufficiently confiding to invest in such a wild-cat venture.

The company was a mere empty sham, devised with calculating cruelty solely for the purpose of ruining one man, an old retired sea-captain, once master of a steamer trading from Scotland to Reykjavik, and now living at a tiny Somersetshire seaport. Averil had met him when staying at Minehead two years before, and found him obsessed by a single idea. The old man had seen the sulphur works of Iceland in his earlier days, and the lying prospectus with its bogus list of directors was aimed at his little capital alone. He invested ten thousand pounds in debentures—mortgages on the most worthless bleak wilderness in that generally unproductive island—and a few hundreds in ordinary stock.

When the crash came, he with hundreds of others was ruined hopelessly, and after wandering, a plaintive, shaking wreck, about the

courts during the inquiry, went back to his little home and died, leaving a daughter to seek her own living in a world not over-kind to the untrained single woman worker.

Other coups of Herman Averil's had brought him greater gain. It is doubtful if more than half of the ten thousand and odd pounds had gone into his pocket. In a hundred other ways he had ruined more victims, executed more brilliantly daring acts of criminality; but nothing more clearly showed his singleness of purpose, his relentless disregard of the ill-fortune of others.

Half a dozen conversations with a chance acquaintance on a holiday, and in his hour of need he could find time amid all the tangled skein of greater affairs to stoop to this little quarry. His memory never failed him. The old sailor's jeering at the primitive methods of the Icelandic sulphur miners, his laboriously acquired knowledge of the sulphur market—his favorite themes of conversation —were all committed to memory; and when he required the old man's savings he obtained the necessary information, bought the three wretchedest deserted farms he could find in the syssel, or parish, of Langholt-by-Dyrholaey, prepared his prospectus, and robbed his victim ruthlessly and with certainty.

Greater frauds, with farther-reaching con-

sequences, occupied most of the time during the inquiry, but the memory of the pitiful questionings of the old ruined sailor lingered in Laurence Averil's mind for years.

Probably because it had been schemed towards the end of his life, his father had taken but little trouble to disguise the dastardly nature of the affair, and no particulars were lacking. Mainly at the request of the purchaser of the shares, the vendor of the property—himself an intimate friend of the dead man's—was called, and his evidence was conclusive.

"I sold the three farms to the deceased for twenty pounds," he said. "They are called Uthlid, Haukadal, and Sveinardal. No, there is no sulphur on them—never was, and never will be. He told me he wanted them because they lay across the line of a projected road between Langholt and Asaa. He said he was going to give the land to the two parishes on condition that they built the road. Farms? Yes, they were farms once—that's how they come to have names; but now they're covered by a skin of lava from six to six-and-twenty feet deep, that came down in the great 1783 eruption. There are a few patches of the original ground uncovered, but they are surrounded by the lava and are difficult to get at, even if it were worth while to try.

They were never good ground—broken black shale with a little summer pasture on them at the best; bad even for Iceland farms—and on the good ones they think nothing of feeding their ponies on fish heads and seaweed in the winter. Sulphur? No, not a speck. Why, the volcanic deposits aren't more than thirty feet deep anywhere, and, as I tell you, they overlie black, poor, shaly land. Besides, they're recent—just lava that overflowed about a hundred years ago—no good to man or beast. Do I know Iceland? Yes, well. Lived there fifteen years, and have had business dealings with the place for the last thirty. I live at Leith—am a fish buyer and trawler owner. How did I buy this land? I didn't buy it. I bought some land close to Langholt village, and had this thrown in, because there was some doubt about my actual boundary where a little lava had overflowed the edge of my ground. There was a big boulder in the center of the Uthlìd ground which the eruption didn't cover, and I had this aching desolation thrown into my purchase, so that I could have a definite landmark to swear to. That's all. Is the ground worth anything? No, not a farthing a square mile."

The old sailor despairingly left the court and went to his ruined home to die. He was buried almost before the official receiver had

elucidated the whole of the facts of the more important affairs entangled in the Averil failure. To officials engaged in examining the keen business men who, despite their acumen, had yet been entrapped by Herman Averil's specious dexterity, this one case seemed unimportant; but it was long before Laurence, though beggared himself, forgot the despairing eyes and shaking hands of his father's unhappy victim.

His own position was hopeless enough. Although of average intelligence, endowed with a receptive mind and a retentive memory, he knew no business, had learnt no profession. He had been through Harrow and Merton as many of the sons of our richer men of the middle classes do go. Having no need for application, he had never been a reading man in the severer sense of the word. His performances were creditable—nothing more.

Tall and lean, he was as near physically perfect as a man of twenty-four should be, and, thanks perhaps to his taste for simple living and the abhorrence of excess he had inherited from his iron father, he enjoyed the riotously perfect health that is the birthright of clean-lived English youth.

His first offer of employment came from his father's friend, Clement Harper, the

vendor of the Iceland property. Passing his hand through the young man's arm as they left the court, he did his best to comfort him.

"It's all no affair of yours at all, man," he said. "Unto the third and fourth generation's a cruel doctrine, I'm thinking. Come you and have some dinner with me to-night."

Laurence, lonely and wretched, was moved to the heart by the roughly spoken kindness, and gladly accepted the invitation. Over the coffee cups Harper made his offer.

"I've worrk for ye, lad, if ye'll take it. Ye can come and learrn to keep a fish-buyer's books, and be a bookkeeper to the end of your life, if ye will. Or I've mair than that for ye, if ye can stand the roughest, cruellest life on airth. Will ye go to sea on a trawler for a couple of years, Laurie, and learrn the business from the bottom? Ye'll see how the worrk's done, and where the boats go, and how the trawler skippers worrk their shares of the catch. Learrn it all, lad, until ye can worrk a trawler yersel', and then come back and help me wi' the business": and Laurence, inclined from childhood for the sea, gladly accepted the offer.

CHAPTER III

The business of the courts and the arrangement of his own private affairs detained Laurence in London for another couple of months, and it was late in September when he arrived at Leith. He went straight to Harper's offices on the Fish Quay. Clement Harper received him cordially, a little brusquely perhaps, owing to the exigencies of business, but with a warm handgrip and words of encouragement.

"Glad to see ye, lad," he said. "Ye'll sail on Wednesday, the day after to-morrow. Have ye a sea kit?"

Laurence nodded. On the sale of his little yacht he had retained all such articles of clothing—guernseys, oilskins, sou'westers, and sea-boots—as he thought might be of use in this new seafaring venture.

"That's well. The worrk'll tear your nice silk-faced oilies to rags in a couple of voyages, but they'll likely serve ye that long. Now I'm a busy man until four o'clock. Go ye down to the waterside and see your new craft for yourself, and come back to me then. Ye'll stay with me when ashore until ye can

get a room of your own—but ye'll not be ashore much. The boat's called the *Fairy Belle,* and a vairy *belle bateau* ye'll find her." He laughed joyously at his outrageous pun, and pushed Laurence towards the door. "Be off wi' ye. I'm a busy man the day."

Accustomed as he had been to the appearance of trawlers at sea, Laurence's heart misgave him when he looked down on the disordered deck of the *Fairy Belle* from the wharfside.

There are no smarter sailors in the world than the fishermen of the northern ports, and when on the great waters their boats are handled in a way that can only excite admiration from the yachtsman who knows his work. Patched though their sails may be and rough their gear, never a line is out of place, and the picturesque coloring of their stained canvas only emphasizes the fact that every sail is doing its utmost work and doing it well. The boats, though often old and even leaky, miracles of discomfort and inconvenience, are yet fast, and, handled as they are by men trained on them from boyhood, they sail like yachts—and racing yachts at that. There is perhaps no lovelier sight to be seen on our coasts than a fleet of trawlers, their sails every shade of red and yellow from deep crimsons and tawny siennas to sul-

phur and gold and cream, twisting and circling round each other over the trawling grounds.

But in harbor, where a yacht is at her trimmest and cleanest, the slovenly appearance of the fishing vessel is painful to the eye. Her unhoused sails lie in great heaps of sodden canvas about her filthy decks. Her open holds exhale a most offensive odor of fish, and her decks and bulwarks are foul with scales and slime. Every rope, free from the tension of the fresh sea winds, hangs slack and dejected, and the whole vessel is a picture of disorder and neglect.

Laurence looked on the unsavory raffle with sore distaste; the rusty, shabby stove-pipe smoking above the tiny forecastle; the array of patched clothing hung out to dry on the rigging; on a dirty, tousle-haired boy lounging by the hatch, smoking a short pipe and spitting into the depths of the hold from time to time: and when he reflected that this was to be his home for the next couple of years, he was sorely tempted to go back to Harper and accept his first contemptuous offer of a bookkeeper's stool. But the strength of mind that had kept the father calm-eyed and quiet through those two torturing years of impending ruin came to his son's aid, and he swung himself down the iron ladder attached

to the quayside and set foot for the first time on the deck of the *Fairy Belle.*

The boy by the hatchway watched him sullenly and in silence.

"Captain aboard?" Laurence asked.

The boy spat again down the hatch.

"Na," he said, without moving.

"Mate?"

"Eh?"

"Is the mate on board?" Laurence queried sharply. Accustomed to ready obedience and civility from his own yacht's crew, his temper was rising.

"There's nae mate," the boy said, in the broadest of Lowland Scotch.

"Is anybody in charge of the boat, then?"

The boy stooped over the hatch. "Jock, ye're wanted," he bawled down.

A growling answer came from the darkness below; the top of a ladder leaning against the side of the hatchway began to shake, and two great grimy hands ascended the rungs, followed by a dirty hairy face beneath a slimy sou'wester; and finally the owner of hands and face appeared on deck. Though a man of a good height he was perhaps an inch shorter than Laurence. His shoulders were enormous, and tended to make his ungainly figure more squat in appearance than it was in reality. He was clothed in a torn blue guernsey,

trousers of some dull red material, coarse as army blanketing, and thigh boots. He stared at the visitor keenly from beneath shaggy yellow eyebrows.

"What d'ye want?" he asked roughly.

"Are you the mate?" Laurence asked.

"There's nae mates on trawlers. I'm leadin' hand:" and then repeated his question, "What d'ye want?"

"I'm from Harper's," Laurence answered to the full as curtly. "I'm going to sea on this boat."

The fisherman spat on the deck. "We want nae holiday-makin' swells aboard here," he said.

"I'm not holiday-making. I'm coming as a hand."

"Ye?" The burly ruffian laughed aloud. "Ye a hand?" He burst into a torrent of Lowland obscenity ridiculing Laurence's appearance from head to foot. "Ye white-handed —— whelp, d'ye think to fule me? Ye wharf-loafing, fo'castle-robbing poppy-cock; get off the boat, d'ye hear, or I'll pitch ye overside."

Laurence filled and lit a pipe, his hands shaking with anger, the boy watching him curiously the while.

Then he sat down on the bulwarks and smoked silently until his temper was in hand,

and then, laying down his pipe, said shortly, "And now get about it—this pitching me overboard."

The bull-necked leading hand rushed at him with an oath, Laurence lifting his elbows clear of his sides as the rush came. The man laughed aloud as he noticed the action, thinking he meant to strike, and in a moment his arms were round the younger man's waist with a grip like iron.

But he had reckoned without his host. Not for nothing had those arms been lifted to invite that grip. As he straightened his back to lift his antagonist from the deck, he found one of the freed elbows beneath his chin, the other crooked behind his neck, the two forming a cruel vice that bent him backwards and backwards until a fall or a broken neck was inevitable. To save himself he released the waist he held between his arms, and as he staggered free he found himself battered on the mouth and beneath the chin by a series of short upward blows that jarred his jaws and skull like strokes from a trip-hammer. Again he jumped back to get room, receiving one savage, long-armed cut beneath the eye as he went, and the two men faced each other, panting.

So far all the honors of the game were with Laurence, but knowing that in any lasting

fight he was certain of defeat, he stood quietly, every nerve strung, thinking his very best.

The rush came quickly, the fisherman striking heavily and quickly, blows any one of which would have knocked Laurence to the deck and probably have stunned him had they got fairly home. Unusual tactics were required. The science of the ring would be childish folly on a deck cumbered with spars and coils of rope, and so, abandoning all science or any attempt to strike or guard, he caught one of the great fists in his own and pulled it towards him suddenly and with all his strength, leaping aside as he did so. His quick movements, aided by the initial impetus of the rush and blow, pulled the man over like a falling tree, his head came against the bulwarks with a sickening crash, and he lay snoring and stunned.

Even then Laurence took no chances. He jumped on to the broad back and gripped the great throat with both hands, thumbs downward and buried in the beard, and forced them in to the flesh until the snoring became a choking gurgle.

The boy drew nearer, staring at the pair in silence. Laurence looked up in his face. It was quite unmoved, and, despite the excitement of the fight, the thought of what a float-

ing hell a boat must be, where such a savage struggle could call for no remark from a boy, struck him with dire premonitions. The boy stooped and looked sideways at the face pressed down to the deck. "Ye've knocked him out," he said. "Ye can let up," and Laurence rose, feeling a little hysterical, and wiped his thumbs on his clothes.

The snoring recommenced, and then the man coughed and made an attempt to rise. Laurence, aided by the boy, turned him over on his back and dragged him to a sitting position, leaning his head and shoulders against the bulwarks. He soon regained consciousness. The snoring lessened to heavy, labored breathing, and the bleared eyes opened and glared sullenly at his antagonist. He shifted his position with difficulty and tried to wipe the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. Then he looked up at Laurence again and muttered some coarse oaths through his blood-clotted beard.

"By G—d, though, ye can fecht!" he said, and stirred himself to rise. Laurence put out a hand to help him, but the offer was repulsed; and getting to his feet unaided, he went aft, slung a bucket overside by a rope tied to its handle, and began to wash the stains of the fight from his face and hair.

Laurence Averil was no coward, but the

brutal and unprovoked ferocity of the fight sickened him. It was over in a matter of a few seconds, and was never more than a nearly silent scuffle at best. Now, as he watched the man plunging his head in the bucket of sea-water, blowing and splashing and rubbing the blood from his hairy face, his first feeling was of wonderment—wonder at the force of the blows he had escaped, at the blind fighting rage that had possessed him and led him—a graduate of Merton—to kneel on the back of a prostrate man and drive his thumbs into his throat. Wonder, too, at the callous behavior of the ship's boy, and the half-dozen of lookers-on who had watched the fight from the trawlers moored alongside or from the edge of the wharf. They had evinced little interest, all behaving as though a fight between a fisherman and a well-dressed young man on a trawler's deck were the most ordinary spectacle in the world. As he stood and looked across at the disorderly decks, at the blood-stained man washing in the stern of the boat, a grim and ugly foreground to the blue waters of the Firth of Forth, and the blue sky beyond, he heard one remark made from the boat behind him, and only one. As commentary it was brief and brutal as the fight itself. A man on the nearest trawler who had seen the whole

affair turned and called to one less advantageously placed in a farther boat. "Jock Menzies's got lickit," he said, and unconcernedly returned to his work of whipping the frayed end of a warp.

Menzies himself, having washed his face and dried it on a shirt hanging in the rigging, came back to Laurence. "Is yon true?" he asked. "That ye're coming as hand aboard here?"

Laurence nodded.

"Then Heaven help ye, my mannie," the brute said. "Wait till I get ye on open water an' I'll promise ye a weary time;" and he went down the ladder into the hold again.

This sounded encouraging. Laurence picked up his pipe, lit it again, and beckoned the boy to him. "What's your name?" he asked sharply.

"Wilyum Clitheroe," the boy answered, and added, "they ca' me Wullie aboard."

"Where's the captain?"

"Ashoore."

"Who's that?" He pointed down the hold.

"Him ye lickit? Jock Menzies. I wouldnae be you when we're at sea. He kilt a boy off Stornoway two years syne. Strook him o'erside. No; they could prove naething—ne'er tried. He fell overboard by nicht, that's all."

"Who else is aboard this cursed boat?" Laurence asked.

"Oscar. He's a Dane. I dinnae ken his ither name."

"What's the captain called?"

"Menzies. He's big Jock's feyther. He's afeard o' Jock. Jock 'ud be master, but he disnae ken the fushing grounds weel."

This was more encouraging yet. If the skipper was Menzies's father, and afraid of him to boot, it looked likely that the son's threat might not be mere unfounded vaporing. Again the thought of the bookkeeper's desk came into his mind, and again he rejected it. If brutality was to be the law, so let it be. He thought with less shame of that attempted strangling, and it seemed well to declare war straightway.

He walked to the hatchway and looked down into the gloom. Sounds as of scraping the sides of the hold came to his ears.

"Menzies," he called. "Jock Menzies."

"What dae ye want?" came from below—with more oaths.

"You. Come to the ladder, you dog."

The bearded face came to the light beneath the hatchway. Laurence leaned over.

"I'm going back to the town," he said. "And as you're not man enough to throw me over I'm going unaided. I shall come back to-

morrow morning with my kit. Then I shall start work on board—and if you want more trouble you raise your voice or your hand higher than your needs and you'll get it. Mind that. Get back to your work, you muck."

The face disappeared without remark, and Laurence climbed the wharfside and walked up the town. But before he went back to Harper's office he spent three pounds of the twenty that remained to him in a second-hand Colt's revolver. He did not mean to drown "off Stornoway," if he could help it.

CHAPTER IV

At half-past nine next morning Laurence was again upon the quay. He was attired in an old suit of blue serge, and carried with him a bag containing such changes of clothing as his past experience had shown him to be necessary for a long and probably wet voyage.

The morning was as perfect as only an early September morning can be. The soft autumnal haze upon the beaches and at the foot of the low cliffland only served to throw into clearer relief the brilliant blue of the sky above. A gentle easterly breeze broke the bright waters of the Firth into shimmering wavelets, and the whole coast scene was clear and vivid in cool northern sunlight.

One or two steamers were passing near the shore, and some trails of smoke, low above the distant horizon, betrayed the presence of others. Half a dozen offshore trawlers, laden with the night's catch, ran before the wind towards the harbor. The picture was cheering and pleasant, the fresh morning air stirring the blood in the veins like wine, and

Laurence descended the ladder to the deck feeling inspirited by its influence.

Menzies was still below at his work of scouring the hold, the noise of his scraping audible above the open hatchway. Nodding to young Clitheroe, who was washing the breakfast things on deck, Laurence threw his bag down the dark forecastle stairway and swung himself down after it.

Not all the disarray and dirt of the decks above were sufficient preparation for the interior of the dismal hole in which he found himself. The place was in semi-darkness, the stench insufferable, and ventilation there was none. A small stove stood by the bottom of the companion way, nearly filling the triangular floor spacing, its hot pipe offering dangerous handhold to the unwary visitor. A disorder of sticky oilskins, dirty clothing, seaboots, and filth unspeakable covered every inch of available floor. An open cupboard by the entry gave glimpses of unappetizing food, wrapped in paper or lying exposed on tin plates. On either side were two bunks, each about a couple of feet wide, in one of which a tumbled heap of torn and grimy blankets, from which issued a sound of muffled snoring, indicated the presence of a third member of the crew.

As Laurence looked around in the dim light

—the place was lit only by a scratched and befouled circular plate of glass in the deck above—for some vacant place whereon to deposit his bag, the snoring ceased and a pale face under a shock of light hair emerged from the blankets and stared at him.

To his civil "good-morning," the pale man vouchsafed only a grunt, followed it up with the inevitable question—this time with a strong Scandinavian accent:—"What d'yo want?"

Laurence answered it with another. "Where's my bunk?" he said.

"Dis is mine. De boy, he sleeps under me. Jock he has de top one on de oder side," and the pale face and light hair disappeared beneath the blankets again.

Laurence emptied the débris in the one remaining bunk out upon the already cumbered floor until he came to the bare boards beneath. Upon them he flung his bag, changed from his serge clothes into an old suit of dungaree overalls, climbed up the companion, took a deep draught of the clear air, and descended by the ladder into the empty hold. Menzies was scraping slime and scales from off its sides, and looked sulkily over his shoulder at the new arrival.

"Ye've come then?" he said.

"I have," Laurence replied. "What's my job?"

Menzies snorted contemptuously. "If ye're sae set on workin' in harbor," he said, "ye can wash the floor o' the hold. Ye'll find a bucket on deck. Yon's a broom;" and Laurence set to work upon the first paid manual labor of his life.

It was a weary business. Forward the hold went beneath the floor of the forecastle, and, owing to the low headroom, the scrubbing had to be done on hands and knees. Being farthest from the hatchway this part of the floor was in almost pitch darkness; it was slippery with scales and offal, and the stench in such a confined space was almost unbearable. Added to this, the difficulty of using a heavy ship's scrubber in so narrow a space, the discomfort of being wet through from the splashing bucketfuls of water, and the necessity for kneeling in it, made Laurence more than once begin to regret the whole of his undertaking.

It was two in the afternoon before he finished, and then all the water and offal had to be sent on deck and emptied overboard. In this he was aided by the boy, who lowered empty buckets and hoisted the full ones to the deck. This done he went ashore, and with William Clitheroe as guide, sought out a slop

shop where for a couple of shillings he bought a straw mattress for his bunk and some other necessaries, a tin mug, and a plate, knife, and fork. These he took to the forecastle and placed in the cupboard, asking no man's leave or license.

On his return to the boat he found that Menzies and the Dane had gone ashore. Impressing William into his service, he did his best, first to clean out and render the forecastle more habitable, and next somewhat to reduce the slovenly disorder on deck. For three hours he labored steadily, coiling ropes, washing down woodwork, and throwing overboard much of the uncleanly raffle of rope ends, seaweed, and fish offal that cumbered the little vessel. Just as his labors approached completion Menzies came on board. He had evidently been drinking, and though he said nothing he spat furiously on the now clean deck and kicked a neat coil of rope into an untidy heap before going below. Laurence, as silent as he, re-coiled the rope and sat upon the bulwarks waiting events.

He had not long to wait. Menzies soon came on deck and went aft to his father's cabin, kicking the coil of rope again as he passed. Laurence once more coiled it neatly, carried it aft upon his arm, placed it care-

fully at the top of the cabin steps, and then, armed with a capstan bar, sat himself upon the companion head. Menzies returned to the deck within a few minutes, and Laurence, the heavy bar swinging in his hands, stood and faced him.

"There's that coil of rope," he said, pointing to it. "Kick it again, will you?"

Menzies looked at the erect and steady figure, at the bar in his hand, at the coil of rope, and then—stepped over it. The first battle of the campaign was won.

The *Fairy Belle* sailed on the night's tide, and for a month Laurence Averil regretted from morning till night and from night till morning that he had ever accepted Harper's offer. Dispiriting as his reception on board had been, he found it but a premonition of such discomfort and misery as he had never conceived possible. Menzies, it is true, offered him no violence. He had, apparently, taken his man's measure, and concluded to leave well alone; but his surliness, his foul language and filthy habits, were alone enough to sicken any shore-bred man, and the remainder of the crew, who were in abject fear of him, followed his example so far as to shun Laurence entirely. The skipper, a little wizened man given to surreptitious drinking,

was entirely under the thumb of his ruffianly son, and his tone towards Laurence varied from whining discourtesy to occasional and equally unpleasant familiarity. When he found his new hand had some idea of navigation he promptly turned his ability to account, almost always leaving Laurence to work out his observations on the broken slate that served him for desk, and sometimes requesting him to take those observations himself.

Not that the battered old quadrant was much used, unless by any chance he was driven off the fishing grounds he knew. Generally the boat was steered by compass and lead alone, and Laurence was greatly surprised to find that the maudlin little fisherman knew the depth and material of nearly all the sea-bottom between Iceland and the Hebrides as intimately as a man knows his own doorstep. After days without an observation of any sort,—days of bitter wind and thick drenching squalls that shut out view of empty sky and empty sea alike,—days of weary, cruel toil at the nets and gear, wet through and wretched, the old man would finger the deep-sea lead handed to him, smell it and say, "Somewheres aboot three hunder mile nor'-nor'-west o' Wick. Tuesday, is it? Keep her course a couple o' points

east; we'll pick up the steamer to-morrow's morrn." And almost invariably he was right.

No such certitude appeared possible to Laurence. When the weather was clear and fine, all he could see was lonely ocean, its line sometimes broken in the distance by the faint cloudlike shape of Rockall, or by an outlier of the Faröes.

Sometimes the ring of sea was empty and desolate; sometimes it showed the distant topsail of another trawler or a faint trail of smoke from a steamer below the sea line. In foul weather even this was denied him, and week after week of angry, wind-scourged, following seas, their crests torn into chill spray, beneath gray, cold rainsqualls or gray and lowering skies, made him feel lonely and lost and miserable.

In thick weather, when the clammy North Sea fogs shut out all sight of sea a dozen yards from their bulwarks, when the boat rose and fell on the still, oily swell, the fog-bell ringing dismally or the hand fog-horn hooting discordantly day and night, the very fear of death came on him. In every slow-counted moment of light or darkness he was filled with dread of the sudden looming of a steamer's steel prow in the darkness, its crushing of their little boat, and a miserable

drowning, unreported, uncared for, far out at sea.

The work, too, was heavy—heart-breaking. Tradition of the sea demanded that watch and watch should be kept, but all hands were needed for the lowering and hoisting of the trawl, and between times the boy and himself often had the deck to themselves. Loneliness and heavy labor, poor and vilely cooked food, wet and cold and discomfort, and the fear of death over all: a hundred times in that first month he made up his mind to the book-keeper's desk when he returned—if ever he should return.

Yet he took some pleasure in learning the business, and so learned readily. Learned to manage the heavy tackles that held and drew the great trawl net; learned to steer the boat, her trawl down, before the following seas that flung her to and fro before them like a toy, striking the clumsy rudder from side to side and threatening to tear the tiller from his cold-stiffened hands; learned such seamanship as all his summer yachting had never shown him, and in so doing at times almost forgot his wretchedness.

Then there were other consolations. Late as the season was, it was pleasant on deck in fine weather. The trawl, too, with its half-ton of wonders at each successful haul, was

a mine of interest. The cod of the northern banks formed perhaps a third of its takings, and flat fish, great halibut and skate, a good half; but the rest was always uncertain, and nearly always, to the eye of a stranger, full of new and strange objects. He got to look for the untying of the bottom of the monstrous bag, slung up to the mast by its heavy blocks and tow ropes, with more and more of interest.

The cruise lasted six weeks, and it was mid October before he again landed at Leith. Changing into clean clothes, he went ashore, had a shave—not without some complacent glances in the mirror at his lean brown face with the sharpened lines beneath the eyes, keener for their days of outlook on shine and storm—and then to Clement Harper's office to demand the bookkeeper's stool.

Mr. Harper was engaged, a clerk told him. While waiting would he check over the invoices of fish from the *Fairy Belle* as delivered by the steamers?

Laurence took them to an unoccupied stool and glanced over them carelessly. He could not check them, the tally of each catch being in the skipper's hands, nor did they, in face of his resolution to quit the life, excite any particular interest in him. At the bottom of the last sheet, however, was written the

amount of money due to the boat, the shares apportioned to each hand. Opposite his own name was a sum that made him gasp. Regarding the voyage as being in some way only a trial before apprenticeship, he had never considered the possibility of any payment being due to him, and yet here in one line was the short intimation that to "L. Averil, hand," was due the sum of seventeen pounds and some odd shillings and pence! As a bookkeeper his salary would be scarcely half as much—and Clement Harper had spoken of this life as being merely preparatory for a better position!

He entered the private office with his resolution somewhat shaken, and the faint taunt underlying his employer's greeting went far to change it altogether.

"And how d'ye like the life, Laurie lad?" he asked.

"It's ghastly," Laurence said shortly.

"Ah. There's a nice three-legged stool ready for ye any day ye like. Ye'll be staying ashore, nae doubt?"

"I meant to, Mr. Harper," Laurence said slowly. "I tell you straight I meant to till this minute, and now I—I'll try one other voyage, at all events."

"Good lad," Clement Harper said, and nodded approvingly. "Ye've your father's

grit—some of it, anyway. Now go and draw your money. Ye've had a good cruise. Seventeen pun' eleven's no bad for a short six weeks. Ye'll dine wi' me to-night, and tell me all about it."

And in three days' time Laurence was at sea again.

CHAPTER V

Menzies's attitude changed noticeably from the very outset of the second voyage. Any attempt at courtesy was impossible from the innate nature of the brute, but attempts at genial familiarity, far more offensive to Laurence than his previous holding aloof, took the place of his former sulky silence. Ready as Laurence would have been to greet any overtures to a more peaceful condition of things on board, he yet doubted the man's sincerity, and was, if possible, more on his guard than before in all his dealings with the skipper's son.

Within the week he found his suspicions justified, and, desperate with the hardness of his life, and with a cold-blooded and skillful attempt at no less than murder, finally decided that *force majeure*—brute force, and force alone—should in future influence all his dealings with Jock Menzies and his kind. If they were irredeemably brutal and ferocious, he too would adapt himself to their savage life and more savage habits. If he was hated for the education that had set him above them, that education should only serve as an

aid to make him worse—far worse—than these brutes that had none.

The fourth day after leaving Leith, Laurence, who had had the early morning watch, came on deck again at eight o'clock. Oscar, the Dane, was at the tiller, Jock Menzies leaning against the bulwarks near him. He relieved the helm, nodding cheerfully in answer to the latter's "Morrn, Averil," and Oscar going forward and descending the forecastle steps, the two men had the deck to themselves.

Laurence had slept soundly and well, the blessed deep-sea sleep that brightens the eye and clears weariness from brain and limbs. The morning, though overcast, was clear and not too cold, and, the breeze being light, the heavy topsail had been hoisted during his watch below.

Big Jock drew his attention to it, almost deprecatingly, Laurence noted thoughtlessly.

"Now, ye're a yachtsman, Averil," he said. "What d'ye think o' the set o' that taups'l?"

"It's rotten bad," Laurence said cheerfully. Menzies's question had anticipated the uninvited remark by a second only. "What fool made fast that downhaul?"

"That'll be Oscar. Gin ye can better it, go an' do it. I'll tak'—tak' th' helm." He moistened his lips and glanced furtively at Laurence as he stretched to the tiller.

Laurence relinquished it and went forward to the mast. The downhaul—the rope that should hold the lower corner of the great topsail close to the mast—hung slack, and the sail bellied out like a flag at its lower edge. Stooping to cast off the rope, he swung by one arm to the downhaul, and before he had attempted to pull with any weight upon it, halyard and sheet had parted, and he was buried beneath a heap of crumpled sail, the heavy spar to which it was attached coming with a crash perpendicularly upon the deck within a couple of feet of his head.

As he shouldered his way from beneath the sail Jock's voice called to him from the stern, and Laurence heard and wondered at the shake in it.

"Wha—what's wrang?" he cried.

"Halyard's parted. Keep you the helm for half an hour," Laurence answered. "I'll go below and get a marline spike and splice it. Sheet's gone too, it seems."

Oscar was playing draughts with the boy when he entered the forecastle and went to his bag.

"You clumsy fool," Laurence said, as the two looked inquiringly at his reappearance. "What sort o' job do you call that—hoisting that topsail? Like a bag."

"Haf you lowered it?" the Dane asked.

"It lowered itself. I took a pull on your slack downhaul, and the halyard parted. Good job for me I wasn't a foot farther forward, or you'd have worked double tides the rest of the voyage."

"I did not belay the downhaul," Oscar said. "Jock, he put taups'l on her. I nefer touch de sail.—Is it your move, William?"

Laurence went on deck with black suspicion in his heart. As he expected, he found halyard and sheet neatly cut half through. The work had not been clumsily done, as a sailor's knife must have done it. The inner strands of the rope alone showed a clean cut, the exterior ones being ragged. A penknife had been pushed between the strands, worked round, and withdrawn. When done, the rope could scarce have shown an external mark.

So this had been the meaning of Jock Menzies's altered manner! He thought of the crash of that heavy spar on the deck, and grew cold with mingled rage and fear. How long before he might expect another attempt on his life, and what form would it take next? It should at all events find him prepared, he resolved then and there. It was as much as he could do to steady his voice as he called to the brute at the helm. "This

spike's full large, Jock. I'll go get a pricker. Shan't be a minute."

The revolver lay at the bottom of his bag. One jerk of the extractor threw the cartridges into his hands, where they seemed strangely light. He pulled out a bullet with his teeth, and—there was no powder behind it.

In that hour gentleness left Laurence Averil. He reloaded the chambers with other cartridges from a hitherto unopened packet, put the revolver in his pocket, and went on deck, resolved that within the hour Menzies should be maimed and broken, or that he himself would be overboard, this wretched burden of so weary a life behind him.

He had not been his father's son if hasty action had followed his resolution. Jock Menzies could wait. Cutting three feet from the treacherous end of the halyard, he spliced it carefully, did as much for the sheet, rehoisted the sail, and went back to the helm, the two rope ends in his hand.

"What d'ye make of that?" he asked.

Menzies eyes were aloft, around the horizon, at the binnacle, looking anywhere but near Laurence's stern face or the accusing rope ends in his hand.

"Chaf—chafed, likely," he almost faltered.

"Chafed?" Laurence held the cut ends six inches from his eyes.

"Eh? Oh, that'll be old rope—or bad," the ruffian lied. The rope was nearly new, and as good Manila as was ever bought.

"It knots well," Laurence said, and tied a hard knot in the end of one piece. "See that?"

The lowered eyes raised themselves to his own curiously, and he lashed out at the hairy face with the knotted end. The rough fiber of the rope cut a deep wound under one eye, tearing off a patch of skin and beard two fingers wide.

Menzies shouted with the agony of the blow, dropped the tiller, and leaped forward —to look into the muzzle of Laurence's pistol. Believing the cartridges harmless, he would have rushed to his death, but the pain in his eye compelled him to cover it with his hand for a moment, and in the darkness Laurence's tense voice filled him with terror.

"I've changed these cartridges," it said. "The ones you spoiled are in the forecastle. Now, you dog—what have you to say before I kill you?"

"Ye—ye'll hang," Menzies said. His throat was husky with fear.

"I'd prefer hanging to this life," Laurence said calmly, and at the moment he

meant it. "Better be hanged than have to live with such filth as you, you murdering beast. But I'll teach you, you scum! I'll show you who's to be master on this boat. Go to the forecastle and call Oscar and the boy, and come aft with them."

Menzies obeyed, his hand before his eye, reeling as he walked. When the three came aft Laurence handed the tiller to the Dane. "Get you forrard, dog," he said to Menzies. "Stand by the mast. William, call the skipper."

The little man came on deck, a startled expression on his face. He had as usual gone to bed drunk, and was anything but clear-headed on being waked; but his son's blood-stained cheek, together with Laurence's savage white face and the revolver in his hand, sobered him swiftly.

"What's this?" he cried.

"This hound of a son of yours has tried to do for me," Laurence said. "And now I've called you and all hands on deck to see justice done. If he could be replaced I'd kill him, I tell you straight; but we can't get another hand here. Hold up your hands, you——"

Up went the hands, palms open and towards the little group by the wheel. Laurence leveled his revolver at the left and

pulled the trigger. The bullet missed its mark, a white splinter of wood jumping in air from the bitts of the bowsprit. Menzies flinched and his hands fell.

"Up again." The barrel came down until

it pointed at the broad breast. The hands rose shakily, the barrel rising after them.

The next shot was better aimed, and grazed a finger before going overboard to ricochet a couple of times upon the waves before disappearing. Menzies broke down and begged for mercy, with tears.

"Up again." A third report, and Big Jock, screaming, fell to his knees. His uplifted left hand showed four fingers and a bloodstained sponge of ragged skin and flesh. The thumb was gone!

CHAPTER VI

The little tragedy ending with the shot that sheared the thumb from Jock Menzies's left hand maimed Laurence in spirit as cruelly as it had the fisherman in body. His breeding, his gentle upbringing, fell from him like a garment, and henceforward all the service his education did him was to point his taunts, or aid him in selecting biting words wherein to frame curses or threats.

He walked like a somber devil unchained, the cold cruelty of his unhappy life incarnate in him. As he passed forward after the shot he stayed to kick and threaten his weeping, broken antagonist as he was rising to his feet; and for the rest of the voyage all hands on board, the skipper included, feared him as they feared nothing else on earth.

A sullen demon of cruelty possessed him. He spared none; the boy felt the weight of his blows and oaths at as little provocation as Menzies and the Dane. Outwardly calm, his face yet began to show relentless lines about the thin lips and nostrils, and at the slightest delay in the execution of an order —he gave more orders now than the skipper

himself, and they were far more swiftly obeyed—heavy punishment of kicks and blows visited the offender, accompanied by such curses and vile mockery as frightened all the crew, accustomed though they were from their childhood to the foulest of language.

Though living in dread of him, they yet admired him, as rough men of the lower orders always will. William in particular almost adored him, and even though his shoulders still showed marks of recent bruises from Laurence's heavy hand, spoke of him with pride to boys on other trawlers at meetings in the lonely seas, or to members of the crew on board the weekly steamers that took their fish to port.

"Ah! ye dinnae ken oor Averil," he would say, as the dinghy tossed and sank by the steamer's iron sides. "Him that lickit Big Jock. He's a de'il, mon. Look ye—five days syne." He would show black bruises on his puny arms, pride in his voice at living on the same boat with "that de'il."

As for Laurence himself, something seemed to have snapped within his mind, cutting him adrift from his past, depriving him of the power of thinking of the future. He was as a man stunned. The need for self-preservation, seldom so acutely defined in a

civilized community, had benumbed his senses.

Had he been capable of clear thought or of reasoning, he would inevitably have committed suicide, but his life only presented itself to him as an ugly dreariness that some outside power called on him to sustain, and he obeyed its dictates blindly. He had endeavored to live among these brutes amicably, respecting their rights and taking little trouble to assert his own, and the result had been his attempted murder.

In his new stupid habit of mind it seemed to him now necessary to disregard all their claims to humanity and to treat them like the treacherous animals they appeared to be. He bore Jock Menzies no special malice. He was no worse than the rest. All the crew only formed just such a part of his hated life as did cold gales, head seas, or frostbite. Over the forces of the almost Arctic winter he had no control: in that alone they seemed to him to differ from the living beings with which he associated them.

He began to drink, too. Not heavily at first, but the raw and fiery spirits sold to the trawlers by Dutch copers grip the brain at early acquaintance. He was rarely drunk, the spirits only fanning his dull resentment against life into moody hatred against some

single member of the crew. In one of his bouts he took the skipper by the neck—the two were drinking together—and shook him like a rat, beating his head against the wall of his own cabin.

The man had meant no offense. Encouraged by beholding his feared and secretly admired hand sitting at his own table, he had ventured upon some foul familiarity, and surprise at the reception of his remark, put forward as a feeler to more genial intercourse, almost overcame his abject terror.

And yet there was some grim method in Laurence's madness. For all that he chastised the men with scorpions as against the whips Jock Menzies had wielded, he drove them to steady labor, and the shares paid to each hand in port rose above, more often than fell below, the receipts of his first voyage.

He never spared himself, and watch and watch were kept justly as they had never before been on the *Fairy Belle*. If he seized on any member of the crew avoiding his share of the work, swift punishment of buffets and tongue-lashings surely ensued; but he as readily thrashed Oscar the Dane for refraining from waking him to take his trick at the helm, as he had, two nights before,

kicked Menzies and Clitheroe for delay in coming on deck for their own.

Not that the justice was aught but unconscious. His mind held nought but hatred—hatred of all things: of his lonely hard life, of the boat, the work, the crew, and the leaden-hued sea and gloomy sky that ringed them round—and his rude justice was as devoid of reason as the cruelty with which he enforced it.

No man dared lift hand or voice against it or against him. Big Jock was broken; he passed him by on deck in silence, obeyed his commands as silently, cringed when directly spoken to, and always addressed him as "Mr. Averil," and "Sir," courtesies unheard of on a trawler since first men went to sea.

The day before the voyage came to a close he called father and son into the little cabin aft and warned them with threats against any attempt at prosecution.

"You, Jock Menzies," he said. "I've shot your thumb off, and serve you d——d well right. We'll be ashore to-morrow, and if either of you tries any law nonsense on me, I'll kill you. I mean it. I hate this life; I'd as soon be hanged as here, afloat with you; but if I stay ashore I shall only starve. If you split, you'll maybe lock me up for six

months, and when I come out I'll kill you. Both of you, mind.

"Now you get forrard and tell Oscar and the boy the same, and see you get them to keep their mouths shut; for if the tale gets out, no matter who tells it, I'll kill you just the same. Get!"

And when the Menzies got ashore not even their womenfolk knew more than that Big Jock had crushed his thumb in the trawl winch.

To his own surprise, Laurence found no pleasure at returning to civilized surroundings. Clement Harper's decently appointed house was irksome to him. The dainty napery and glass of his well-furnished table, so delightful on his first return, gave him now no approach to any feeling of comfort. The dreary forecastle assorted better with his frame of mind, and on his third return to Leith he curtly announced to his host that he had taken rooms nearer the Fish Quay. He could look after his work there better, he said. In the day he did work savagely and furiously, but his nights were spent among the fishermen and sailors in the taverns of the waterside. He rarely appeared at the office, and never again at Harper's house, his resentment at his hard fate being in no small degree directed

against the man he considered responsible for it.

Clement Harper shook his head at his protégé's altered manner and appearance. "It'd ha' killed most," he said; "it's made a man o' him, but not altogether a good man from the Sunday-school point o' view, I'm thinking. He's a reckles deevil—I hope the lad'll not throw himself away."

Indeed Laurence was falling low. Hating himself for it, as he hated all his surroundings, he lived when ashore in the same squalid vice as his fellows. As he had at first foreseen, his education and knowledge of the better things of life only made him chief among men who had known only the worst. "Better be head stoker in hell than grill," he said once, when Harper had ventured to remonstrate with him; and the roughest fishermen in the fleet, the vilest-tongued viragos of the waterside, held him in dread. The future held nothing for him. Dreary though this life might be—squalid, wretched, and cruel—it was yet better, he thought, to bear this savage striving for existence, this wild life of fighting, swearing, and drinking, than to make any attempt to labor back to decency. He thought no more of Harper's offer of a place in the business in the future. What right had he, foul-tongued, foul-lived

blackguard that he was, to work with men of smooth hands and tongues? The past was dead. His very speech took on the Lowland inflection and accent, and Laurence Averil, graduate and gentleman, was lost—merged in Laurie Averil, brute and drunken fisherman.

CHAPTER VII

In the April following upon Laurence's embarkment on his life of purgatory, Harper by way of experiment purchased a steam trawler and offered him the position of leading hand aboard her. Laurence carelessly accepted, moved more by an idle interest in the steam-driven machinery than by any desire of promotion or increased pay. To his surprise, William Clitheroe begged to be allowed to accompany him, and on being refused returned to the request again and again.

"You young fool," Laurence said. "What d'you want to come for? You'll only rate as boy if you do, and if you stay on the *Fairy Belle* you'll get a shift upwards—they'll likely take another boy now."

"Ah don't care," the boy said. "Tak' me, Averil. Jock Menzies'll half kill us all over again when ye're gone. I know the way ye like your grub cooked—an'—an' all. Tak' me wi' ye."

"All right," Laurence assented. "You can come if you like. I'll speak to Harper

about it;" and the upshot was that the boy made the transfer as well.

Preceded by a shocking reputation, Laurence from the first found strained relations with every hand on board. The fireman, a Geordie from Sunderland, took advantage of their first meeting to vaunt the prowess of Durham and the colliery districts as against that of the Lowlands, only withdrawing his contentions after a fight, lasting fifteen minutes, in which he lost two teeth and ended by being knocked down the engine-room hatch. Laurence, nursing a dislocated finger-joint, explained in language unfit for repetition that he held no brief for the Lowlanders, but that he should then or in future be delighted to fight any swine from south or north of the Tweed upon the slightest provocation; in consequence finding himself shunned henceforward by the crew of the *Bute* as religiously as he had been aboard the *Fairy Belle.*

He neither felt nor showed regrets or annoyance. The advantages possessed by steam over sail were soon manifest to him, and he threw himself with growing interest in the study of the northern fishing grounds. Demanding and readily obtaining a new set of charts from Harper after the *Bute's* first voyage he began to work

as he had never thought he could care to do.

Day and night, with but the shortest allowance of sleep, he was on the *Bute's* decks, forecastle, or bridge, committing to a fortunately excellent memory the set of tides and ocean currents, or from the tallowed deep-sea lead or the refuse at the bottom of the trawl-bag gaining information as to the depth and materials, sand or rock, gravel, shingle or silt, of the great level sea-bottom that lies between Iceland, the Faröes, and the fjords of Norway.

All through the soft northern summer he labored with almost mechanical method and care, and when, in the following September, Harper, well satisfied with the results of his experiment, purchased two more nearly new steam trawlers, Laurence was appointed to the post of skipper on one of them.

His promotion made little alteration to his way of life. As master he was no less a brute than he had been as man. When ashore he still drank and fought, still lived in the same unlovely vice and squalor to which he had fallen after his second voyage. At sea, it is true, he now seldom drank—even heavily chastised and maltreated the men beneath him who did—but he was known to every

man of the fleet as a hard driver and a callous, selfish brute.

As a consequence his voyages were almost always successful, and within six months of his promotion his bank balance showed nearly three hundred pounds to his credit, in place of the limited means at his disposal when he arrived at Leith. Equally inevitably the only men content to serve under him were the hardest and most reckless *mauvais sujets* in Harper's employ, men who feared, as they themselves said, "nor man, nor deevil—only our —— Laurie."

Their fear was mixed with admiration, and later, after experience of a careless but just directness of purpose that underlay his brutality, with some small measure of good will. Clitheroe, especially, now lately promoted to deck hand, worshiped him almost as a dog might its master, and with his clumsy fingers took upon himself the care of Laurence's limited wardrobe.

Ashore the men drank with their skipper, were proud to be allowed to accompany him in the narrow wynds of the harbor-side, and spoke in awed pride of his foul and brutal language and his sullen readiness in quarrel; but at sea, Laurence's command was absolute, and the discipline on board the *Westray* was a proverb in the fleet. Did promotion

or accident remove a man of his crew, a dozen of the ablest fishermen and most reckless ne'er-do-weels in Leith were ready to fight for the privilege of taking his place, not all the reports of the skipper's hardness proving a deterrent in view of the good pay drawn by his crew.

Harper, speaking but little, yet held Laurence's ability to handle men in high esteem. "I'll bide my time," he said once, when some more than usually disgraceful report of his protégé reached him. "The lad's lost his polish, has forgotten he e'er was a gentleman, maybe. I'm no so sure he's the worse for a while. Better sow wild oats in rank soil—they'll ripen and be reaped the sooner. If he'd kept his polish in the fleet, he'd maybe have sloughed some of it ashore afterwards. A deevil? Oh ay, he's that—a' that. A dour, hard case is Laurence; but he can drive men, and he can catch fish, and that's what I pay him to do. When he comes ashore here in the office there'll be busy times, I'm thinking."

Early in the following spring he broached the subject to Laurence himself. Directed by one of the *Westray's* crew, he sought him in the public-house in which he lodged.

Laurence was sitting in the sanded bar, drinking and exchanging coarse chaff with

the landlord's daughter, a red-haired brazen hoyden of nineteen. The pair looked round angrily as he entered, the girl sitting on the edge of the table at which Laurence was seated, her head back, her bare arms impudently akimbo.

"I want t' speak to ye, Laurence," Harper said, disregarding his companion's attitude.

"Speak on," Laurence replied. "We've no secrets here."

The girl leered approval, and Harper spoke shortly, with rising temper.

"I have. I want to talk business—my business, I'll trouble ye to remember."

Laurence turned his head to the girl. "Get out," he said.

"Ah'll not. Laurie dear, 'tis a public room. Ah! let go of my arm, you—you deevil, Averil."

Laurence slammed the door behind her. "What d'ye want?" he asked.

But Clement's eyes had followed the little scuffle, and his tone was cold. Hearsay was one thing—this evident familiarity and companionship another.

"Who's that?" he asked sternly.

"Mary Anstruther. You needn't be so sour about it. She's no worse than the rest of us, an'—an' that's my business, I'll

trouble you to remember. Speak of your own."

"You're a fool and a young blackguard," Harper said angrily. "I'll be short wi' ye. McLeod'll have the *Westray* next June, and ye'll begin at the office. I'm pleased enough wi' your work, but I can't stand your play, an' so we'll make a change. You'll cut all these blackguard friends of yours, get rooms in a decent part o' the town, and see if ye've forgotten ye once were a gentleman. I'll have no harbor-loafing drunkards in my office—and I'll leave your father's son afloat no longer. Ye've learned more than I wanted, Laurie, my man."

"My father was a thief and a hypocrite," Laurence said. "I'm a blackguard, but I'm no hypocrite. See you here, Clement Harper, I don't want to come ashore. Look at my hands." He held them up, powerful, knotted, and gnarled. "That's what the life's done for me—all through me. I've lost touch with shore folk, and I don't want the shore life. Leave me on the *Westray*. Ye'll get no better skipper."

"Your hands'll come soft again—and so'll the rest of you," Harper replied. "I've no more to say. I want ye in the office, and there ye'll be next June. I want ye, man. The business needs another driver there, and

ye've learned drivin' among other things, they tell me. Come back to decency, lad. You, an educated man, to want to stop in this pig of a life! Come back to decent work, decent food, the society of the class ye belong to. If it's the sea, wait a year or two and then get a wee bit yacht, or spend your holidays afloat on a liner among people of the same grade, with the same ideals and aspirations as yourself."

Laurence flushed under the tan of his skin, and laughed angrily. "Ideals and aspirations," he sneered. "My ideals and aspirations are the same as those of the folk I sail with now. What more can you give me, Clement Harper? Our ideals are, briefly, whisky; and our aspirations are to catch fish, make short voyages, and return to this "—his guernseyed arm swept round the low room, indicating all its grime and slovenliness—"and enjoy the society of Mary Anstruthers. Never fear, man, I'm in sympathy with my kind. We all have the same intent —to take all we're able, and keep it as long as we can. Could you find such unanimity in any drawing-room?"

"I'll waste no more words on ye," Harper said, nettled. "Ye leave the *Westray* next June, I give ye notice, and if ye care to tak' the place I've offered ye in the office, it'll

be at your disposal for a month—in which time ye can look about ye and see if ye can do better." He rose, walked out, and slammed the door behind him.

Laurence laughed, a laugh that sounded like a curse, so brutally malignant was it, and then sat, his empty pipe between his teeth, thinking over this change in his fortunes. He had long since almost forgotten the original arrangement Harper had sketched out for him. Indeed, when it occurred to him to reflect upon it, it had been with a feeling of marked distaste at again mingling in the society he had known in his youth.

Utterly discarding his early training, he had assumed the life, clothing, and manners of the fisher-folk too thoroughly for that. He knew, too, that there was no more able skipper than himself in the whole of Harper's employ, and he had often sulkily reflected, with his usual savage ill-feeling towards all men, that Harper had, as he put it, "done himself none so ill" in offering him the position he now held. In this frame of mind his employer's new offer, as evidently made from motives of friendship as it was distasteful, came both as a surprise and an annoyance.

He swore softly to himself, and then, re-

membering the bank-book in his bedroom upstairs, laughed savagely again. He would, indeed, return to his own class of society. His three hundred odd pounds should give him a six weeks' carnival of vice in London —perhaps even permitting of a run over to Paris or to Monte Carlo. And then, when the money was gone, he would come back to Harper and tell him how he had spent it—show him what likelihood there was of his reclamation, and demand a situation on a trawler again as skipper or hand—he cared little which. If he were penniless, and still resolute in refusing Harper's offer of preferment, it was hardly to be expected that he would be cast altogether adrift. And if he were, what matter? True, with Harper's ill will it was doubtful if he could obtain another place in Leith; but Leith was not the only fishing port in the British Isles, and his knowledge of the trawling grounds would always be a valuable asset in his favor.

He called aloud, and Mary Anstruther came into the room, her chin erect, half defiant and all sloven.

"I've got the sack," Laurence announced.

"Serve ye right. Ye hurt my arms just now. What's he sacked ye for?"

"You—as much as anything. He's of-

fered me a shop in the office if I cut all your lot.''

The girl flushed red beneath her fair skin —the exquisite skin that so often goes with red hair in folk of Scandinavian descent. Her manner softened. ''Will—will ye tak' it, Laurie?'' she asked.

''Not I. Curse the office. I'm going to London—and Paris—and maybe Monte Carlo, and have the devil and all of a time spending my savings. I'll take you, Mary, my dear.—No, I won't, though. I'll take nobody. If I want to play the fool I reckon I can find folk to help me there without paying rail fares for 'em—carrying coals to Newcastle. You can stay here—I'm coming back when the brass is gone,—and I can kiss you all I want to then.''

Mary's eyes drooped—and then looked up again.

''I—I'll come wi' ye, Laurie, gin ye like,'' she said.

''Wouldn't be bothered with you, my dear.'' His gaze looked through the girl. ''Begad! I'm beginning to look forward to it. Well-dressed dinners and pretty, well-dressed fools of women to share 'em.'' He smacked his lips. ''They used to do you well at the Trocadero, and Verrey's, and the 'Cri.' I don't suppose they've forgotten

much—not half as much as I have, anyway. Oh, and the Royale and the Madeleine—and dear dirty Père Vachette's again! Jubilee! it will be an orgie. Clement Harper's a pal, after all.

"And the Côte du Midi; Cannes—Nice. I wonder if I can hit a pigeon these days. And

perhaps, if only I can find a number or two at the tables, get a stroke of luck?

"But that's out of the question. No half hopes of luck and whimpering when they don't come off. Just a definite three hundred quids' worth of joyous spree, and then back to this cursed hole—and you, and your sort, Mary, my dear. If I've stood it once,

I can again. Won't you be delighted to see me back on a trawler once more, you red-headed light o' Leith?"

The girl regarded him curiously between half-closed eyelids. "I dinnae ken the half ye're talking about, Laurence Averil," she said. "What's yon places ye're speakin' of?"

"Restaurants and cafés, my peach." He tried to put an arm around her waist, but she repulsed him. "Places where I'm going to dine softly and hear music, and smell flowers and sweet scents again. Places where clever rogues and lucky fools do consort—have been consorting these last eighteen months while I've been living this cursed life, and where they'll still consort after I'm broke and back here again. Next June—oh! and the parks and the chestnut trees in the Tuileries Gardens! It'll be the fag end of the Riviera season, but no matter for that: I shan't be jaded, for one. Give us a kiss, red Mary—Mary o' Scots—or whatever your name is."

She spun on her heel and struck him full on the mouth with all her strength. "Go!" she cried and choked. "Go. I pray Heaven I'll never see your wicked, lying face again." She burst into hysterical tears and ran from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

His crazy resolution once formed, nothing could deter Laurence from putting it into effect. He would have gone at once, but reflecting that if he remained on the *Westray* until forced by Harper to leave her, he would possess a cogent argument for his re-employment on his return, he decided to stay till June. Besides, the London season would only then be commencing.

He gave himself over to anticipations of a royal carnival of unlicense, and his work and surroundings at sea at once naturally reasserted the effect they had upon him at first acquaintance. Coming pleasures in view, his last two voyages were, if possible, more distasteful than his first, and added to his hatred of his environment came a new fear—the dread that some accident of the unruly sea should come between him and his contemplated folly.

Such an accident, terrible in its swift tragedy of young Clitheroe's death, occurred towards the latter end of May, but the horror and shock of it, while subduing the spirits of the other men of the crew, had no effect

on him beyond a redoubled eagerness to quit, if only for a short ease and forgetfulness, the risks and toil of the fishing fleet.

The *Westray* was returning from the shallow waters to the westward of Reykjavik in the fourth week of the voyage. In the ordinary course of things the trawler would have made an earlier return to port, but Laurence had encountered one of Harper's carrier steamers a week before and had transferred the contents of his full hold to hers. As he argued to himself, the longer the voyage the more money to spend, and the men under him were only too glad to echo the seaman's saw of "More days, more dollars." Laurence, being on the extreme northward of the ground he knew, argued rightly that if he could send home a full cargo from Iceland he could amass another on his way homewards, thus drawing double pay for the single voyage.

It was a lovely morning, bright and clear, with pure northern sunlight and a gentle breeze that brought from the land some chill hint of opening springtime. Iceland lay low on the port beam, the bare towering bastions of Portland—the first view the traveler obtains of the island—shouldering themselves like a separate islet high above the sands to east and westward. Laurence had given or-

ders for the trawl to be raised, and had gone aft to stand by the taffrail to watch it come aboard. A deck hand stood amidships, his hand on the starting lever of the steam winch, and Clitheroe stood facing him, his back to Laurence, taking the slack of the tow rope into his hands as the winch unwound it to coil on the deck at his side.

Suddenly the winding ceased, the little steamer checking and dragging heavily at the tow and yawing awkwardly from side to side.

Laurence swore. "Curse this foul rocky bottom. 'Vast heaving, you. Reverse the winch. Davy, keep her a couple o' points south."

"Ay, ay," came from the little bridge, and the wheel spun in the helmsman's hands as the stumpy bows swung away to the right.

The reversing lever of the winch came over smartly, the revolving iron cylinder rewinding Clitheroe's neat coils of rope and throwing them again on the deck in an untidy tangle that dragged towards the bulwarks and overside.

"That'll do," Laurence shouted. "Heave again. She should come now."

Again the lever grated and the clacking winch resumed its work. A frightened shout from the deck hand made Laurence turn his

head, and, unable to help, he saw the whole of the ghastly business from first to last.

Just as the tow rope straightened Clitheroe stepped backward into the last of its coils. The rope, tightening with a jerk, gripped his ankle like a vice, and, pulling it from under him, threw him face down across the hissing, chattering winch. Flinging out his arms to save his head, the now tight rope caught and held his left hand firmly on the revolving drum, jerking the tied body tense as a harp-string from wrist to heel in a swifter and more awful rack than ever medieval torturer devised.

It was all over in a moment. The wretched lad never screamed. A little "Ah!" of surprise—an "Ah" that ended in a groan—and Averil's shout of "Reverse winch. Engines hard astern," set him free and dropped his limp body in a long tumbled heap upon the deck.

Laurence ran forward. "Stop engines," he called, and stooped over the white drawn face lying with its cheek on the deck plates.

The little steamer, her engines silenced, rose and fell on the easy sea, the shadows of bulwarks and gear rising and falling on her sunlit decks as she moved. Everything was very silent—so silent that the hissing of steam from her steam valve and the sound

of the engineer's feet on his iron gratings in the engine room below sounded loudly in the ears of the men on deck. The man at the wheel, holding it with one hand, gazed silently down over his shoulder at the little group by the winch. The winch driver looked curiously from the prostrate body on the deck to Averil's anxious face, never speaking. And, more silent, more still than them all, young Clitheroe lay at their feet.

Laurence knelt and called in his ear, "Clitheroe—William. Are you hurt, man?"

The eyes opened, and in them was bright pain.

"Ay, a bit, Averil." His speech was slow and deliberate. "I—I'll be a' richt in a minute. Put me by the bulwarks there an' get t' trawl up. Ye can tend me then."

He never groaned nor complained while Lawrence and the deck hand, clumsily for all their care, carried him to the steamer's side and laid him down. The ship's boy was set to his work of coiling away the tow, and the winch began again to clack and grate as the great trawl swung slowly inboard.

Cutting the tie of the bag, Laurence walked round the pile of fish and went to the wounded lad's side.

"Where are you hurt?" he asked.

"I'm done, Averil," the boy answered low,

his brow beaded with pain and his breath broken with gasps. "Nay, ye neednae touch me—I'm past helping. See there." He glanced downwards at a red trickle that pooled and ran from his waist, mixing with the moisture on the wet deck. "That —— winch tore me right open. I'll go hame nae mair."

Laurence stared, stunned, only curious and surprised, for all the horror of it. The boy had never spoken a word to complain.

Clitheroe saw the wonder in his eyes. "Oh ay, it's so," he gasped. "See ye here, Averil, put in yonder, and bury me ashore. I've been at sea a' my life—leave me rest under green grass. Besides, I fear they —— fish. I've catched 'em a' my life—dinnae let them get me." He jerked his pain-twisted lips into some semblance of a smile, then swore aloud at his agony, using oaths he had often heard from Laurence's own mouth.

"There's my brither—on the *Bonaventure,* he is. I stole his 'bacca pouch last time ashore. Gie't back to him, will ye? Nay, I've nae ither folks. Averil, say me one thing. Ye're a man, ye are, by ——" He broke out again into more poor blasphemies, made pitiful by the wild eyes and tortured brow. "Tell me, did I die like a man? I

never squeaked, did I?—not when that —— winch tore me. Did I?"

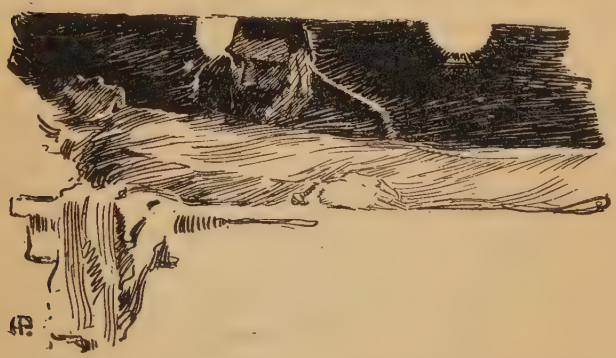
His voice failed, and for all the measureless sadness of it, all Laurence could feel was dull astonishment that so torn a shape could hold any desires, ambitions, whatever. Yet this broken heap could die like a Spartan, could endure agony in silence, all in the same spirit in which the boy had aped his own reckless manners, copied his oaths and dress —had even announced, amid the laughter of the other men, that he would never shave; he'd grow "a beard like oor Averil's."

He looked over his shoulder at the men behind him. They were sorting the catch, flinging the smaller, dragging the larger fish into separate heaps, as they worked kicking offal behind them with their sea-boots. Though they made acknowledgment of the situation by working in unusual silence, never a one of them so much as looked at him or the figure lying at his feet, and when he himself looked down again the boy was dead.

Two of the men carried the body aft and laid it upon his cabin table, placing some old sail canvas under it to keep those red stains from the wood. They went forward about their work again, and Laurence sat by the table, his eyes hot and dry, and some half-formed emotion—was it regret?—mingling

with the brute nature now ingrained in him.

So low had he fallen that he readily made the tiny effort it required to still it, and then, to steady his nerves, took a bottle of brandy from the cupboard at his elbow and drank



a couple of glasses, noting in some grim spirit of callousness that the still burden on the table yet left space for the tumbler beside its head. He would allow himself no feeling but annoyance at the loss of a hand just as he was starting across the fishing grounds with empty holds.

And the boy's preposterous demand to be buried ashore—he refused to entertain the idea for a moment, merely resolving to throw the body overboard, decently weighted, so as to lose no time in getting back to his work.

With the motion of the vessel an end of

the dead boy's handkerchief slid softly from around his neck upon the table. Laurence snatched at his tumbler, and, so doing, noted that the brightly colored fabric was exactly like one of his own. For the moment he thought Clitheroe was wearing a stolen article, until he found his own in his pocket. The boy must have bought it, highly priced as it was—Laurence's one trait that remained to him of olden days was a fondness for soft and expensive underclothing for personal wear—must have bought it in imitation of his skipper's. A hundred memories of the manner in which Clitheroe had adored him—had copied the way in which he dressed, even to the angle at which his cap was worn; had sworn his pet oaths; had spat and idled, and walked with a little careless swagger—in all following, as best he could, Laurence's worst examples. He pictured the slight figure in its blue guernsey and sea-boots—nearly always worn by himself, though seldom by the other men when ashore—leaning against the street corners or walking down the narrow wynds of Leith. And his death—silent endurance of torture—dying as he conceived Laurence himself would die. His last words had been to demand whether he had died like a man—this stunted boy of scarce eighteen.

Laurence drank again—raw spirit this time—and looked at the dread thin face, still lined with the pain of death. Something like admiration rose in him. The boy had died like a man, and, since he had demanded it, buried ashore he should be.

He went on deck and hailed the bridge. "Change your course to nor'-east," he said. "When Portland's abeam again, give me a call."

"Ay, ay. Nor'-east it is," came the answer, and the little steamer's bows were sweeping to the left as Laurence descended again into his cabin to consult the chart.

Covering so large an area of sea, its scale was small, and it was, moreover, marked and scrawled all over with his own notes and observations. Placing it on his knees, he ran his finger along the coast-line to the eastward, searching among the names of villages, headlands, and bays for some inlet that should give him harbor-room. The nearest—Seithisfiord—was on the eastern coast, two days' steaming; so, resolving to anchor off-shore, to convey the body ashore in the dinghy, and then to leave it to the care of the inhabitants of the nearest village or farm, his finger ranged back along the chart to the nearest point on the coast-line.

Just to the eastward of Portland, a broad,

shallow stream of glacier water, the Kirthafljot, ran over wide beaches to the sea, and close to it two hamlets bore the names of Asaa and Langholt.

Some half-lost train of memory stirred in his brain. Asaa and Langholt—Langholt and Asaa—where had he heard those names before? Langholt and Asaa—what was the other word that had occurred in conjunction with them?—a word that surely must link up the chain of memory. Asaa?—Langholt? Puzzled, his finger ran down the coast-line, and there in fine letters beneath "C. Portland," was its native name, "Dyrholaey!"

Of course; Asaa, and Langholt-by-Dyrholaey! That was it. The names of the villages where lay the valueless lands with which his father had swindled the old sea-captain. Laurence swore more oaths softly, undeterred by the presence of his silent companion stretched upon the cabin table.

He poured himself another glass of spirits and drank, frowning as he pored over the chart. Dyrholaey—he tried idly to guess at its meaning. Door-hole-isle, likely enough, he thought, having many times seen the great ocean-worn archway in the headland.

Strange that fate should send him here, just as he was about to leave for a while the hated labors to which his father's sin had

bound him. Doorhole Isle—just as the ocean had worn the great arch in the volcanic cliffs, so had usage of the sea torn and rent that structure of breeding and education that once he had thought part of himself. And now, hardened and defiled rather than cleansed and purified by the fire through which he had passed, he was going lower yet, to ostentatiously fling away his savings in debauchery more attractive than the vice of the seaports.

Why should fate serve him so? What harm had he done that he himself should be debarred from the best in life—that best he had tasted in youth? More keenly than deprivation of good to himself came the remembrance of the last words of the dead now lying so still before him. Oaths and blasphemy—his own teaching. Such a death was worse than the perishing of the beasts of the field. Devoid of religion, and with no belief in a future existence, some fragment of his early training yet gave him a momentary distaste of himself, almost a half-felt shame at the memory of his own vile words from those lips, now stiffening in death.

He drank again, until the spirits flushed his face and puffed his hot eyelids. Dyrholaey—ay, Doorhole Island. Portland—the land of the portal. The same name in two

tongues. And he himself was going to stoop —yes, stoop—to a portal that should take him, a wild brute of the lonely sea wastes, into a land of milk and honey, a realm of pleasant words and smells and tastes, of soft voices and well-bred, delicate, sweet sin.

And what after? To come back to sea—and perhaps some day to be winch-trapped even as this poor devil had been, or to fall overside and drown, weighted down by heavy sea-clothing, as many a better man had done before him. Memory and imagination supplied a hundred details of that last passing, suggested its occurrence in a score of different ways, and the terror of a lonely death at sea struck cold to his very inmost soul.

Strange that his work on this boy should end here, of all places; that the dead whose soul he had damned—if damning were aught but the fiction he believed—would be laid out of sight under the lava-blocks and starving land through which his father before him had struck down another such harmless victim. Father and son, alike in their work: sea-captain and trawler's deck hand, victims both, broken by their ignorance of aught but the poor simple ways of life at sea.

He drank again, and looked at the drawn, set face upon the table.

What did it matter, after all? Who were

they, that these dead should so mutely accuse him? He had no hand in the killing of the body—only the soul. His father, too, had never laid hands on his victim—only robbed him with cunning and greed. He laughed softly but brutally, and tried to think of the Northern Boulevards in June sunlight; but somehow the thoughts refused to flow easily as heretofore.

It was *not* his fault—or his father's. "Clumsy —— fools," he said aloud, with an oath; and then, "By G—d! I'm getting morbid—or tight. I'll give the whelp his burial ashore, and then, hey for southern sunlight!"

He sewed Clitheroe's dead body in a blanket that but half a dozen hours before had wrapped it in a lighter rest than this that knew no waking. This done, he went on deck, and through his glasses examined the now approaching coast. The quantity he had drunk had made him somewhat stupid, and he answered the helmsman's hail of "Portland's abeam" with a dull, "What say?"

"Portland's abeam," the man repeated, waving his hand towards it.

Laurence rocked on his heels with the motion of the boat. "Do you think I haven't eyes, you —— clown?" he said. "Mind your wheel—keep t' your own business."

"Ye told me to give ye a hail," the man

responded sulkily, and turned his back upon him.

Laurence drunkenly reflected. So he had, of course. But that was if he was below. Couldn't the fool see he was on deck? Conscious that he was betraying his condition, he turned his attention again to the land.

His glass showed dark gray shingle beaches broken in one place by a band of green shot with silver. That must be the stream with the difficult name—Kir—Kirthafljot. That was it. And Langholt should be near its mouth. Closer examination revealed a couple of wooden gable ends under grass-grown roofs, on which a sheep was feeding. A wooden groyne lay down the beach, some boats hauled up beside it, and another was being pushed into the water by two or three men. In the clear air their thick clothing and ear-flapped caps were distinctly visible by the glass's aid. Laurence gauged the distance with his eye.

"Run up some sort of a flag half mast," he called to the bridge. "We'll anchor about five miles farther along—just by that bit of a river. I'm going to take him ashore." He jerked his thumb towards the cabin; the man at the wheel growled a surly assent, and Laurence went below again to the company of the shrouded bundle on his table.

CHAPTER IX

A STRANGE voice through his skylight half an hour later roused him from dull reverie. He ascended the narrow stairway to find two of his men striving against the obstacles to conversation with a snuff-smeared Icelander who had climbed to the deck from the boat he had seen launched from Langholt beach, which now was towing alongside.

All three men turned to him as he approached.

"What does he want?" he asked.

The men were unable to tell him. "Either he wants to buy tobacco or sell it," they said. "We cannae make out what he says."

Laurence tried him in Danish, a few words of which he had picked up in Thorshavn, and found he desired to buy. The farms were cut off from civilization throughout the winter, and the *Westray* was the first spring visitor. He took the man to the skylight and pointed down at the blanket-wrapped bundle on the table. "Would the native boat take the body ashore and attend to its interment?" he asked.

The man's answer was difficult to under-

stand, but as far as Laurence could comprehend, it would be necessary for the skipper or a member of the crew to accompany the corpse ashore for the purpose of proving identity or making a deposition as to the manner of death. One constantly repeated word—sysselman—he guessed at last to mean some sort of head man of the parish or district. Apparently the body could not be buried without this official's permission.

"We'll have to anchor, after all," he said, and gave the required orders. "Get you below, two of you, and get him on deck. Parcel him up with a spare line and lower into that boat."

The body was slung overside, much as any other inanimate bundle might be—Laurence, with as much tobacco as the crew could spare, following it; and the boat pulled away from the anchoring trawler across the intervening water to the shore.

Two of the men carried their burden up the stony beach and into a low-ceiled room in the nearer house. Laurence, following, found a fat, sheep-faced woman standing by it, her homely face alive with regret.

"Ah! I sorry—sorry," she said brokenly.

"You speak English?" Laurence inquired, in surprise.

"Yess; little—ver' little. I was in Hotel Reykjavik—long ago—before I was marry."

"Is your husband sysselman?"

"Sysselmann. Oh no—no. He live fir—fifteen mile—there," she pointed inland with a fat forefinger.

"At Asaa?"

"Yess, Asaa. You know Asaa?"

Laurence shook his head, fuming with annoyance. Here it was already late afternoon, and this precious official had to be fetched before he could proceed farther. He considered whether he should get put aboard, up anchor, and away. They would have to bury the lad then, at their own charges and without further trouble to himself.

Seeing the woman bring out a clean sheet to lay over the body, he decided to stay. After all, it was but a day. If these homely strangers could so care for the sacred dead they had never known, it would be hardly meet that a member of his own crew should be left to their care like so much worthless carrion.

"When will the sysselman be here?" he asked.

"We send to-night. He come to-morrow. Cannot more queek as that."

"Very well," Laurence said. "I will sleep

on board and come ashore in the morning. Can the body stay here?"

"Yess. Oah yess. But not here in room. Outside. You come."

She led him into a nearly empty shed adjoining the house. Some few dry fish lay in one corner, fenced off from the depredations of the ponies by sheets of corrugated iron. Laurence helping her, two of the sheets were laid on the dirty floor, and the body, brought in by its former bearers, was laid upon them.

Though the place cried aloud of starving poverty, the woman, after exchanging a few words with her companions, asked him to join them at their afternoon meal. Their gentle manners and simplicity almost angered him. The effect of his morning's potations was dying out of him, leaving him depressed and sulky, and their quiet contentment moved him to dull rage. He refused curtly—said he was going for a walk; and when he perceived from the sympathy in their faces that they imagined him grieving for a comrade, he could have struck them.

He turned from them and started to walk inland across the poor, sparsely covered land; then, looking back over his shoulder, pointed out a high rock that broke the horizon two or three miles away, and demanded

its name. He would walk there and back—walk the last of the liquor out of him.

"Ookthleed," he thought the woman answered. He repeated the word interrogatively: "Ookthleed?"

"Ja, ja. Yess," they answered, in chorus. "Ookthleed."

A sudden memory prompted him. He retraced his steps, searching in his pockets until he found a lead pencil. "Write it down," he told the woman; and, as he expected, she wrote it, "Uthlìd!"

The word set his memory loose. "Haukadal?" he asked. They pointed to more bare lands to the left. "Sveinardal?" To the right this time. Those very worthless lands his father had bought from Clement Harper three years before.

Laurence laughed, a short, mirthless laugh that stopped the woman's inquiries, rendered more incoherent through surprise. He would walk to this Uthlìd rock, and sit there and hug his hate to him—his hate of all the world. That would be a truly well-conceived artistic whole: that he, stupefied and wild-eyed with the dying effects of drink, should sit awaiting the burial of this boy who had learned naught but evil from him, amid the lands his suave thief of a father had used to ruin one of the least of all *his* victims. And as a con-

trast what could be more suitable than the future two months. In a week—a fortnight at most—he would be luxuriously speeding south to riot and revel and befoul himself yet more. Totally disregarding the onlookers, he turned again inland and set off quickly, staggering a little as he walked.

All around him the land was bare and rugged. Great barren rocks of lava broke the poor heather and grass in all directions. Here and there between the lava patches were tiny naked fields, and snow lay in every sheltered hollow. As the afternoon lengthened the wind grew cold, and he pulled his rough pilot coat closer around him, tying his kerchief more tightly round his neck.

Poor and jejune land; arid, useless lava, cold wind sweeping across the waste; wasted lives and broken, purposeless deaths—how well his father's means had matched his work.

"Must have had an artistic sense of completeness, too," Laurence said aloud, his teeth inclined to chatter with cold and misery, for all his attempt at a sneer.

Uthlìd rock proved to be a mass of volcanic tufa, perhaps forty feet high. On one side the lava had pressed upwards to half its height, as a wave dashes upwards against a wall, and there had cooled hard. On the

opposite side the ground was clear for some small space where the boulder had parted the lava stream. Snow lay deep upon the higher side, but the strengthening sun had melted it in the hollow, and one or two tiny flowers already showed between the sparse grass blades.

Being sheltered from the wind by the boulder, and visited by the low sun, the hollow showed promise of warmth. Laurence jumped down into it, sought a sunlit corner, and lighting a pipe sat and smoked, his knees beneath his chin, stupidly watching the western sky.

He tried to remember the details of the inquiry into his father's affairs, but nothing beyond the memory of the old sea-captain's wretched face came to supplement the farm names that had set this train of thought in motion. Such a scared, unhappy face. As though it were now before him, he could see the plaintive working of the brow over the gray eyes with the pale, senile arc in them; the old man's stubby fingers—still the sailor's short, broad hand for all its late-won whiteness—plucking nervously at his beard or mustache, touching his lips, always fidgeting around the querulous mouth.

And then arose a memory of his own father's face. The square brows and jaw, the

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haps a foot or more over the uneven ground, and scratched and ragged fragments of spalled rock lay beneath it. He kicked at one of them with his heavy sea-boots, breaking off a small piece of dark greenish stone. It showed a lighter green on its broken side, with a hint of iridescence. "Some sort of jasper or agate," he said to himself, then put it into his pocket and walked back across the lonely plain to Langholt, reaching the farm just as sunset gave place to the long twilight of the northern latitudes.

A messenger had been sent to the sysselman, the woman told him. In all probability he would arrive before noon on the morrow, after which Clitheroe's burial could take place as soon as Laurence desired; so, promising to come ashore in the morning, he again entered the boat and was rowed off to the *Westray*.

CHAPTER X

After making the necessary declarations before the sysselman, Laurence paid the modest sum demanded by the folks of Langholt for funeral expenses, and hastened back on board as soon as possible. The weather still kept fine, and the crew, though short-handed, worked well, so that the *Westray* arrived in Leith in but two days over the week. In another two he had handed the trawler over to her new skipper, drawn the money lying to his credit at the office, locked his sea-kit in his room at Anstruther's, and, without a word of farewell or explanation to any soul in Leith, was speeding south as fast as the Edinburgh-London express could carry him.

He rode third class. "No use wasting money yet," he told himself. "That'll begin later on—when I've got into the swim. I'll go to Pat Dwyer first. He'll know the ropes —if he hasn't got married in the last two years." Riding straight from King's Cross to Dwyer's office in Chancery Lane, he demanded to see him.

A young solicitor is of all men the most readily accessible in office hours, so, though

Laurence's clothes were rough serge, his hat half a year old, and his manner to the clerks little short of insult, he yet was soon ushered into his old friend's private room.

Dwyer looked up from the table as he entered, polite inquiry in his uplifted eyebrows.

"And what can I have the pleasure of doing for you, sir?" he asked.

"You can try and polish your memory a bit, Pat Dwyer," Laurence answered. "And if you drop that *de haut en bas* manner you'll do no harm."

"Saints above! It's Laurie Averil!" He was out of his chair in a moment, and the men gripped hands. "And yet 'tisn't the old Laurence, somehow. What the blazes have you been doing with yourself, man? Navvying? Look at your hands—and you must be six inches bigger round the chest. What is it, my returned prodigal? The husks of the swine never did that for you. You've been living on stolen pork."

"I've been living among the swine all right," Laurence answered. "And a pig's life's no catch, Pat, my dear. And now I've —I've made my little pile, and I've come back to town to do some of it in, and you've got to help. . . . Curse your business. Your business first is to give me a line to your tailor and tell me where I'm to stay. I must

lay low a couple of days until I get some decent duds, I suppose, and then, oh ho! we'll rogue and we'll range. Where do the boys foregather now, Pat? Are there many of 'em in town? And what's on at the theaters?

"Oh, man alive, it's good to be back in dear, dirty London again. Do you know, I enjoyed coming here from King's Cross as much as if I was a country yokel riding in a real proper taxi for the first time in my life. I've been living in the bottomless pit, old man. Haven't spoken to an educated man or kissed a decently dressed woman for two years."

"Whe-whew!" Dwyer whistled through his teeth. "This is *not* the Laurence Averil we knew. 'Rogue and range—kiss a well-dressed woman'—what the deuce? You've been finishing your education, Master Laurie."

"*Wer liebt nicht wein, weib und gesang.*" Laurence trolled the old students' song from the depths of his chest, to the great wonderment of the clerks in the adjoining office. "Pre-haps I have altered—some. If you stick the most moral of bears on hot plates he'll learn to dance. You'll see whether I've learned, mighty soon. I'm somewhat out of practice, and clumsy, maybe; but my heart's

in it, and I'll do my best, and you shall introduce me to partners, my worthy Master of Ceremonies. Now, what do we do tonight?"

Dwyer deliberated. "There's a decent show at the Alhambra. Manuela—she's the last new Spanish importation—takes Carmen in the ballet. They say it's all right. Will that do?"

"Oh, anything, man—anything'll do. Manuela, eh? What's become of Otero? She was the leading light of Spanish dancing when I went away. Not that I took much notice of 'em in those days. My education wasn't completed."

"Where are you staying?" Dwyer asked.

"Nowhere yet. I told you I wanted digs. My home is my taxi at present, and if you look out of the window you'll see all my Lares and Penates in one small kitbag on its roof. What's it to be—an hotel for a day or two?"

"Um. I don't know." He touched a bell. "Ask Mr. Tyrrell if he can spare me a moment."

Mr. Tyrrell, a thin, fair man, prematurely bald and with forensic side whiskers, was introduced to Laurence as "Our new partner. This is Mr. Averil, an old friend of mine. He wants rooms, Tyrrell. What about that

furnished flat in New Cavendish Street that you were speaking of last week? How would that do, Laurence? Four rooms—a fiver a week or thereabouts. It's a bit hot, but I dare say we could get it for less if you take it for the expiration of the lease."

"I only want it for a time," Laurence explained. "I'll be off to Paris next week, likely enough. Should like a look at Monte Carlo before the season's done, too. Let's go see the place, and then if it suits, and the sticks and fittings are decent, I'll take it for a month, anyway. Come round and show it to me now. Where can I get a key?"

"Oh, at the caretaker's, for certain. But I can't come now. Can you amuse yourself for an hour? Yes? Then clear out and come back at half-past four, and I'm your man."

Laurence paid his chauffeur, sent his bag upstairs by a clerk, and turned down Chancery Lane towards the Strand and Fleet Street.

The roaring torrents of life flowing east and west surged in his ears like the sound of a sea, and he stood by the Law Courts in a daze of happiness. This was coming back to life, in all good earnest. His face radiant with the joy of it all, he sauntered down the Strand, his feet light and springy on the good paving under him, as full of idle de-

light as a holidaying schoolboy. This was resurrection—nothing less. He could have sung aloud for sheer blitheness of heart. This was worth waiting two years for. Let the dead past bury its dead—the future take care of itself. Here was the glorious present to be lived. *Carpe Diem* should be his motto.

He climbed on a westward-bound 'bus and went as far as Piccadilly Circus, rejoicing in the afternoon sunlight and crowds every inch of the way. To think he could ever have trodden these streets unmoved!—that exile should be needed before he could perceive their beauties, or enjoy immersion in the great turmoil, in this full tide of life. Here things moved—here things were done. "Man *is* naturally gregarious," he said aloud to himself. "It's only to have tasted the loneliness of those cursed northern waters to be sure of that."

The chauffeur overheard his muttering. He turned and looked up at him.

"What say?" he asked.

"I said it was good to get back to life again," Laurence told him.

"Y' don't look as if you'd been dead—perticler," the man said, glancing at his bronzed skin and brown beard.

"I have, then; worse than dead for two years," Laurence replied.

The man, observing his work-worn hands, merely nodded, forming his own conclusions.

"Done time, that cove," he remarked to the conductor after Laurence had left the 'bus. "Been worse'n dead for two years, he said. More likely three—he never got that color and them 'ands through indoor labor. Quarryin', likely—Portland or Princetown, I expect. Spoke like a toff, too. I lay 'e 'as a time for the next week or two, if 'e's got the brass." In which sentiment Laurence, had he heard it, would have heartily concurred.

He returned to Dwyer & Tyrrell's offices just before five, to find Dwyer waiting for him. A cab was called, and the two men set off for New Cavendish Street together.

"And now," Dwyer said, "perhaps you'll tell me where you've been, and what you've done, and what you're going to do next?".

Laurence leaned over his knees, gazing straight before him over the horse's back.

"I'll tell you as much as I please. I've had a rough trip—a ghastly rough trip, Pat. I've made money, and I've come back here to spend it. I want amusement. I want dinners and suppers; I want theaters and music and evil company of the washed and scented and bedecked pattern. I remember you for a reprobate—how often have I called

you a fool for it, eh?—and I want you to introduce me to a few people who'll help me play the fool myself. Is that plain?"

"M—yes. Somewhat. You certainly have altered. To come to town with the deliberate intent of a spree is distinctly a rural idea. Most of us find enough bother in slipping from virtue occasionally without going to seek for trouble from malice prepense. But you were always the methodical type of brute that makes up his mind what he'll do before he starts about it. I'm not so sure that Sir Pandarus of Troy is my rôle, exactly, all the same."

"Look here"—Laurence put a hand on his wrist—"if you're going to kick—kick, and have done with it. I ask you, as a personal favor, to introduce me to half a dozen of your friends. You used to stage-door dangle at one time. Let me feed and fondle one or two of the breed of hogs that spend their lives at it, and your duty's done, and you can get back to the office and virtue, if you like. Refuse, if you will." His eyebrows lowered, his jaw projecting in dull animal obstinacy. "It won't affect matters in the least degree. I've been kicked about in intense misery for two years, old gentleman. I've lived like a hog and with worse than hogs. I've been crowded to the very edge of

murder. I've had to behave like Satan himself to get an unlovely living. I've never had a man care whether I lived or died, except perhaps one poor fool, and I saw him torn nearly in two before my eyes only about a fortnight ago. My hand's against every man, and every man's hand's religiously against me. Never was such an Ishmael. I care nothing for anybody on the earth except myself—and, with or without your help, I'm going to have the run of my teeth for a bit, before I settle down to anything.

"I've got money, thank Heaven—no, thanks to myself, I mean. I got it by the sweat of my brow and at the risk of my life, and I'll spend it on myself as I jolly well please. I wouldn't give a penny, a farthing of it, to save injured innocence from starvation and the street, I tell you straight."

"Who's asking you?"

"Nobody. I know that. But let me continue to expound. Do you know——? I told you I hadn't spoken to an educated man for two years. Let me make the most of it.

"I shall spend it on myself solely and simply in gratifying my animal appetites. I shall spend much of it in going about in cabs. I begin to understand the instinct that sends Jack ashore in large parties about town in

hired growlers. He waves flags also—and gets drunk. I haven't quite assimilated the flag-waving instinct yet; but as to getting drunk—cheer oh, Pat! You wait and see. Meanwhile, this is good enough to go on with. The chug-chug of that motor, while bowling smoothly along on decently laid road, *is* music, man—sublime music. Is this the flat?"

"Yes. Come and have a look at it, and stop your indecent protestations, your proclaiming aloud of evil intents. I'll introduce you to one or two of the 'breed of hogs' you speak so tenderly of, and you must do the rest yourself. You're pretty beastly in your open statements, and when I remember you two years ago, it strikes me that you've had an interesting time, if a rough one. However, that's your affair, and if you don't choose to speak of it, you can do the other thing. How do you like the crib?"

"'Tain't dear at a fiver a week, is it?" Laurence asked. The place was on the second floor, well lighted, well furnished, and well kept. "Whose is it?"

"Forget his name. Tyrrell knows him. Some sort of a writer, I fancy—essays and reviews. He's been ordered south for his health—consumptive tendency, I believe. Does that matter?"

"Divvle a bit. It's an additional recommendation. Who'll do for me?"

The hall porter's wife had done the little housekeeping the late occupant required, they were informed. "Very late hours 'e kep', gentlemen," that functionary thought fit to add. "A very quiet, nice gentleman 'e was, though, an' mostly 'e dined out at restaurants and such."

"Ah! So shall I. I shall also keep late hours, but as to being nice or quiet,—well, that you'll find out later. Now we'll go do shopping, Pat. Can I rake together a suit of dress duds at a minute's notice like this? I suppose it can be managed. And I must get a piano in, too. The consumptive predecessor wasn't musical, evidently."

The hall porter coughed behind his hand, viewing the new tenant of the rooms with subdued interest from the corner of his eye.

"You'll excuse me, gentlemen—you spoke of late hours, sir. Per'aps I ought to say that piano-playing and music are gen'rally discontinued in the Mansions at eleven P.M."

"Are they? You be sugared! Then in future they won't be. See? If other tenants object, you can send in their complaints in due course. I'm not taking the place with a view to going back to school."

"Don't you be quite too frabjous an ass," Dwyer requested, when they had re-entered the cab and were being driven back to Oxford Street. "Just you remember, my sweet, irrepressible Ishmael, that I'm a respectable, quiet young solicitor, and that Tyrrell's my partner and a good fellow; also that the owner of those sticks is a pal of his. If you're going to play the fool and break up the 'appy 'ome in the exuberance of your spirits, you will make things unpleasant for me.

"More—you've been plain with me to the verge of indecency in announcing your intentions—in which, to tell the truth, I'm not particularly interested. On other points you preserve a discreet silence. Now, see here. You were broke when you went away. You come back inside of two years with every appearance of having performed manual labor in the open air; and if I can judge from your hands and eyes, and that little slip just now about Jack ashore, I should guess you've been at sea. Manual labor at sea is not highly paid—no recent successful piracies have been reported, as far as I know—and yet you talk of having made a pile in that short time.

"I don't want to ask personal or impertinent questions, but as you, in a manner of

speaking, ask me to supply you with credentials—— It's purely a matter of business, you understand. If you wanted to borrow money, you know where to come for it. I told you that two years ago, didn't I? But this is business. Play the fool if you like, and welcome, but kindly oblige me by pulling out the soft stop occasionally, and let me know beforehand how I stand."

Laurence looked round at him, a queerly curious expression in his puckered eyelids.

"That's all right. I'll pay in a hundred to your business account as soon as the bank's open to-morrow, and you can act for me with your partner's pal—pay the rent for a month in advance. Will that do—er—for a start? As to playing the fool—for all my talk and my hands and my manners, I haven't forgotten the difference between wardroom and fo'castle drunk. . . . What I said to the porter? Oh yes! Only the fool annoyed me with his clack, and I thought he might as well understand from the first that I propose to keep my own hours, and do as I please."

"I fancy you said something to the same effect before," Dwyer said. "Now we'll get about your shopping—unless you'd like to lead off by smashing a few plate-glass windows as a declaration that you fear no foe

in shining armor—or blue cloth. Here's your piano shop, for a start."

And the London of a June evening, beautiful as a jeweled woman in a shaded light, took Laurence to its heart and made him divinely happy. All the world went to pleasure or to dine, and never a lighted theater but spoke to him of welcome, never a face that glanced on him from beneath the window of a passing cab but seemed to smile in greeting, and the soft night air on his face was like a caress. Wherever they stopped obsequious tradesmen took his orders, backed by Dwyer's references, unquestioningly and with alacrity, promising delivery that same evening of the more especially needed of his purchases. Dress clothes were not immediately procurable, but Dwyer's tailor, anxious to please, was able to find a suit which, together with others destined for a less favored customer, he declared would fit Laurence well, and consented to make a few slight alterations and deliver the whole order of four suits to him on the morrow. To bootmakers they went, to wine merchants and glovers, hatters and tobacconists, Laurence spending money joyously and recklessly right and left, and then to dine. Because they were not arrayed in evening wear they partook of the meal in a restaurant not usu-

ally frequented by Dwyer's more intimate acquaintance, but that all should be in accordance with his preconceived ideas, Laurence stipulated for music; and when cigars and coffee were served, he felt the jagged fragment of rock in his pocket almost with disbelief of the past. Clitheroe's dying face —he tried to recall it, and the bitter wastes beneath which that face now lay. They must be a dream—and yet, if they had never been, could life be so sweet as this? The contrast was needed, else such happiness were impossible.

After dinner he demanded another ride, and a cab took them to Hyde Park Corner and back. "I want to see the long line of cab lamps outside the clubs, Pat," Laurence pleaded. "Man, I've dreamed of 'em."

At the Alhambra he drank freely, yet with care. "Get drunk? No fear. I wouldn't lose a minute—not a second of it." The moving rainbow of the ballet, the soul-maddening whine of stringed instruments, intoxicated him far more than anything he had to drink. "To shut eyes and just listen is the seventh heaven, Pat. And to open them and see that"—he nodded towards the radiantly appointed beauty of the crowded stage, advancing, retreating, wreathing and winding and grouping ever into new color

schemes, revealing ever new beauties of face and form. "Man alive, it's gilding the lily. There, that's a mixed metaphor, but let it stand. It's none so bad."

Amid the trailing robes of the lounge he held talk, much to Dwyer's disgust, with a painted native of the Faröes. "You go to the deuce," he said, when his companion remonstrated. "My taste's all right. I only want to speak to the woman and stand her a couple of drinks. I've been where she comes from. She's part of the whole joyous scheme of this heaven of a day. She provides the chiaroscuro—the deep splash of shadow in the foreground that brightens all the coloring and rounds the forms. While we talk, you go and find a couple of men to come home and have supper at the digs. You'll find me here when you come back."

He subsided into a seat and talked Danish to the woman. When Dwyer came back her head was bent and her lips shaking.

"Give her money? Not likely. She's had two whiskies and sodas out of me, and that's all I owed her," he said afterwards in answer to inquiry. "She looked a peg low, did she? Likely enough. We talked of Osterö and Thorshavn. Ever been there? No? Her home. I suppose she was happy there, once upon a time. When I was there I was

in direst misery, my friend, and I wanted her clucking Danish to remind me of the difference between then and now. See?"

"I see you're a most infernal brute," Dwyer said wrathfully. "Why couldn't you leave the poor beast alone. She never harmed you."

"Nor I her. I've given her two drinks—I call that charity. You said she was a peg low yourself. Here's the flat. Oh joy! Joy as of harvest!"

He hummed a few bars of dance music from one of the new light operas, shuffling his feet on the pavement to beat time, and breaking into the words at the finish. "Come up, you men. It'll be a scratch supper if there's anything at all, but there's drinks—heaps. Pat here vouches for 'em; I got 'em from his man. And when we've had tucker you shall teach me this new fancy whist. Bridge, is it? Come up."

Mixed cold foods made a supper of sorts, and when at half-past one Laurence settled down, a pile of loose change at his elbow, to be instructed in the mysteries of bridge, he felt his cup of happiness was nearly full.

CHAPTER XI

A BRIGHT noon three weeks later found Laurence in the demi-toilette of shirt-sleeves before his open window, gazing idly across the street at the houses opposite and the passers-by upon the sunny pavement before them. For a while he stared, heavy-eyed, seeing nothing, then, turning to the empty room, stretched himself and yawned. "Heigh-ho!" he said dully. "To think one could kick the bottom out of things in less than a month! I half wish I was at sea again."

Now there is an unwritten law that howsoever man obeys the inexorable edict, "Work to eat," his material and the tools of his calling shall surely react upon him, marking on him in some ineffaceable way the sign-manual of his craft. Deeper than gnarled hands and furrowed brow the traces of his labor must inevitably go; and the man's outlook on life and religion, his relations towards his fellows—nay, his very love itself—are determined in no small degree by the toil in which he labors for his bread.

And the man who strives with the ele-

mental forces of nature walks in spirit apart from all his kind. He has his craftmark deep branded as surely on his soul as on his knotted hands. The colonist, the engineer, the drainer of bog and marsh, the breaker of untilled land, all serve one Mistress. Her service is not kind, and weaker men must seek other, or stand trial by her laws. She has but one punishment for all offenses whatsoever—and that punishment is death. For the bridge builder's unsteady girder—Death. For the clay-founded dam—Death. For the unguarded homestead set in far lands—Death.

But the follower of the sea is set about with this death penalty beyond them all. For the unwary footstep, the indistinct order, the rotten spar, the ill-kept hull, the falsely laid course—for all the one doom sentence, against which there is no appeal. Ignorance is no plea in her stern courts. Willful negligence or weariness, innocence or rash greed, alike are beat to carrion on her lee shores. The mast that human eye unwarily appraised in port snaps before the winter gales; pampero or typhoon drag straight the weak link of the groaning anchor chain; the belated deck cargo of October shifts, and the listing hull dives once too often.

Withal, there is some brave sincerity about

her. "Come," says she, "and do me service. My face is beautiful, and new and beautiful things have I in one hand for my servants' delight; but in the other is a naked sword. I speak my warning plain. Slip or grow weary, and you die.

'Ye th' unharnessed waves shall test, th' immediate gulfs condemn.
Unless ye owe the fates a jest, guard how ye jest with them.'"

And men look upon her loveliness and go, knowing their doom. And many die. But they that live have knowledge of three things the town-sheltered man may never see. Life they know, and death, too well; but also they have seen her promises and warnings fulfilled in letter and in spirit to the utmost, and lies to them are a weariness of the flesh for evermore. Their craftmark may be seen within their steady eyes—and its name is Truth.

Laurence's listless arms fell to his sides and he looked around the room with heavy eyes. He had discarded his beard, and his clean-shaven lips and jaw showed sallow against the lingering brown of his cheeks. His face was wearied and sneering, and dark pouches showed beneath his eyes.

For three weeks he had, as he himself said, "Lived forty hours in every twenty-four,"

only to learn what a wiser man learned in the same school before him, that all—all—is vanity.

All had gone as he had declared it should go. Every pleasant folly that could be bought he had taken to himself; every appetite had been sated to the full. He had frequented strangely diverse places. Race-stands knew his face as well as the coulisses of the theaters, and the best that music and the arts could give him he had enjoyed to the full. His bent was eclectic, if his tastes were catholic. That which was best—most costly, most sought after—he swore was good enough for him; and only the day before an afternoon at the Academy had preceded a drive to and dinner at Richmond and a riotous supper in this very room, of which evidences now lay in plenty around him.

The housekeeper's perfunctory tidying of the table to lay his breakfast had swept a débris of cards and unsmoked cigarettes to the mantelpiece. A long glove hung from the heap, its fingers dangling over the fireplace, and beneath an armchair lay a dove-colored shoe, of quaintly puritan cut.

He stooped for it and held it at arm's length, remembering how its owner, gathering together her voluminous draperies, had clicked across the pavement on its fellow, her

stockinged foot held clear of the cool flagstones, sparrows hopping close about her, fearless in the unfrequented dawn.

"I'll fine you for it, Lucifer," she had laughed from the car window. "It's been lost on your premises, and I believe you've stolen it—all for love of poor little me. Sentence of the court will be pronounced in due course—when you come to see me to-morrow. No, it's to-morrow now—this afternoon. Home."

As Laurence held it in his hand some strange throwback of memory—perhaps the jointing of the pavement suggested alternately lapped deck plates—brought Clitheroe's dead face before him, and he threw the shoe angrily behind the fender. "Ugh!" he said, and shivered; then sat down to his untasted breakfast.

Staled by late hours, his appetite was poor. He drank some coffee and rummaged in the heap upon the mantelpiece for a pipe. Finding none, in a whiff of temper he dragged off the dangling glove and some cigarettes, letting them fall to the floor, and then retired to the bedroom to search his pockets, on his return opening and leaving ajar the outer door of the flat for the convenience of the housekeeper when she should come to clear away his breakfast things.

Sinking into a deep armchair by the window, he blew clouds of smoke into the air, idly watching their thinning flow towards the open casement. Following them, his thoughts wandered into the outer air, northwards, to Leith, northwards, farther yet, to the banks and the weariness of old toil.

How long was it since? Years, surely. Impossible that a short month ago he himself had been on unsteady decks, the sight and sounds of the sea in his eyes and ears, recollections of recent tragedy in his mind.

Five weeks ago Clitheroe was alive—if that existence could be called life. How the fool of a boy had worshiped him! He thought of the mute testimony of the handkerchief that had slipped upon the table beside the tumbler, and compared it with soft-voiced protestations, prettily couched, that he had heard but a few hours past. Which were true? Well for him he knew. How would the future taste when it came, if he were weak enough for one moment to forget that the soft protestations were only to be bought with money—were uttered for gain alone? Those same lips that had whispered them had laughed and called him "Lucifer," paying fearless tribute to the wicked strength in him. Clitheroe had worshiped the strength too, good and bad alike—if any good there

were. And his payment? Kicks and blows and curses. "I'll fine you for it, Lucifer," she had said.

Never doubt it! In money, or money's equivalent, of course. Curse the money! After all, it bought nothing worth having. Clitheroe's dying curses were more savory. At the worst, they showed genuine admiration of the man he had first heard utter them. Which of his genial acquaintance—which of the owners of the soft voices and sweet lips —would die, racked with agony, in stoic silence, because they imagined he might give to them a place in his memory?

For all the toil and cruelty of that life, it made men. He looked at his scarred hands with the broken finger nails, the roughened skin. To hide them he had gone gloved on all possible occasions; but the fact that they had excited no remark when uncovered angered him again. A hunchback, a squint, a hydrocephalic idiot's defect would have been passed over in like silence. What would the fools have said if the gnarled hands had not been paying for their approval?

Oh, he was weary and sick of it all! He had gulped too deeply—a wiser man would have gone more deliberately about it—and now he was sick.

He had meant to go to Paris, he remem-

bered. But what was the use? It would be the same thing there—the same allurements, the same follies, the same weariness of the flesh, ill-used by excesses.

The sea life, after all, gave one good thing —Power. The *man* gave orders—the underman obeyed them; and sternness of strife must first distinguish man from underman. What could this life show half so sweet? Obedience? Yes. Swift and graceful obedience, soft acquiescence, pleasant smiles, pretty speeches, kisses bought to order. But money bought them, not the strong right arm, the clear command. Any puny fool with a rent roll could outbuy him in the market.

He tried to picture any one of the men who had been his guests of the night before cowing the crew of the *Fairy Belle,* and half regretted he had not brought maimed Jock Menzies with him as servant to swell his poor triumph here. Uncouth Caliban would have heightened the beauties of Lais and Thais and Rhodope; the broad shoulders and bull-neck, bent by brute force, have shown well beside the pleasantries of the fools who now fulfilled his wishes at the pull of his purse-strings.

Yet Mesdemoiselles Lais and company were fair—most fair—dazzlingly fair. He thought of a delicately molded, sweet-scented head

that had bent over and kissed his own in farewell as he lay in that very chair that morning.

"What's the use of getting sour with it?" he said aloud, rising and crossing to the fireplace to knock the ashes from his finished pipe. "It's all sham—empty sham. Any man knows that. But so's all life; and this is a pretty part of the sham, anyway." Then, in answer to a knock at the door: "Come in. You can clear away the things."

The order was received in silence, and he turned round to find a strange girl standing where his housekeeper should have been.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I had no idea Mr. Webster had any visitors. The door was open, and I walked in. Please can I see him?"

Laurence, devoid of reverence for all womankind, looked her up and down. She was slim of figure and unsuitably dressed, he decided. Her brown tweed walking dress, though well made, was for March wear rather than for June. Her hat was of brown, some white about it; brown hair lay under it, framing a brown-eyed pale face over a little white neck, and in her ungloved hand she held a few large envelopes.

"Who, did you say?" he asked.

"Mr. Webster, please."

"I never heard of him."

"Then what are you doing in his rooms?" She looked bravely in his eyes, and Laurence caught himself thinking of the little common mountain butterfly that sits in shadow like a dead leaf, its wings clipped tight, until in answer to a stray sunbeam it flips them open in a glory of warmth and golden brown.

"Eh?" he said stupidly.

"What are you doing in Mr. Webster's rooms?" She backed towards the door.

Laurence laughed at the faint alarm in her face.

"They're my rooms. If you want the man who had them before me, you're a bit late. I believe he's in Italy, or somewhere south. Wasn't he consumptive?"

The girl nodded, and her figure slid into

lines of weariness at once. "Do you know his address?" she asked.

"No. I expect Mr. Tyrrell—Messrs. Dwyer & Tyrrell, of Chancery Lane—can tell you. I got the rooms through them. Is it anything important?"

"No, thank you. Yes, though; it is to me—rather. Messrs. Dyer & Tyrrell, did you say?"

"Dwyer & Tyrrell. I'm going there myself as soon as I have my coat on. Shall I give you a lift? You look tired."

"Thank you. I am—a little. I've been walking this morning."

"Sit down, then. I'll be back in ten minutes."

He retired to his bedroom to complete his toilet. On his return he found the girl seated, regarding the disarray of the room with grave disapproval, and her manner to him was chilling in its politeness.

On the pavement, "I think I'll walk," she said, "if you don't mind. I'm rested now."

The cab wheeled up beside the curb.

"But I do mind." Laurence was feeling like a naughty child, caught in misdeeds. "I'm going the same way, I tell you. Get in."

The girl looked up in surprise. "I *beg* your pardon," she said.

"I beg yours. I'm afraid my manner is a little brusque at times. It's due to want of feminine society, perhaps. Won't you get in? It seems silly, when we're both going the same way. . . ."

She climbed in, somewhat mollified—then stiffened again. "Your room hinted at no lack of feminine society."

"I had a mixed supper-party last night," Laurence explained. "I'm afraid they got larking and made the place untidy. A bachelor's diggings are rarely remarkable for order, are they?"

"I suppose not. Oh, this is nice." She leaned back against the cushions, watching the sunlit life of Oxford Street flying past, and Laurence looked round at her pale face. Regular features, long lashes, pink lips—"That's anemia, caused by under-feeding," he said to himself. "They ought to show scarlet against that skin." He looked at her hands, but she had gloved them in his absence, and they told him nothing.

"You like it? So do I. Do you know, when I came back to London three weeks ago I swore I'd spend all my spare time driving about in taxis."

"And have you?"

"Some of it. The novelty wears off after

a while. I wonder you're as pleased with it, living in town as you do."

"I don't use cabs, you see. The humble 'bus and Twopenny Tube serve my needs. . . . Oh, is this the place? Thank you very much. Good-morning."

"What brings you here?" Dwyer asked him.

"Little brown girl in a cab. She came to the digs seeking one Webster. I told her Tyrrell 'ud likely know his address, and swore I was coming here myself, and would she like a lift? That's all. How's your head after last night?"

"All right. Glad I left early, though. You look like chewed string. Are you standing me a lunch?"

"No. Don't think so. Half a mind to chase little brown girl again and stand her one—if she'll take it on. There's Tyrrell's door shutting. I'm off."

She was half-way to the Law Courts before he caught her up.

"Excuse me," he said, and she turned round to find him standing hat in hand. "It's fearful cheek, I know; but—but I'm quite alone in London, and—and, please will you tell me where I can get a decent lunch?"

She looked him steadily between the eyes.

"You should take notice of women's dresses more carefully," she said. "You gave me a lift from your rooms here in a cab not ten minutes ago, and now you ask me to tell you where to lunch—you, who have been in town three weeks. Perhaps, next time you desire to insult a woman in the street you'll make sure of her back view before you begin."

Laurence laughed uneasily. "You mistake," he said. "Better be plain, I suppose. I wasn't mistaken in your back view. I knew perfectly well who you were, and I followed you from Dwyer & Tyrrell's to ask you to lunch with me, only—only I lost courage when you turned round, and so I started with a lie.

"See here. This much is true. I am alone for an hour or two, and I want some lunch. Also, I hate having a meal alone—have had too many so—and I shall be very glad if you'll share lunch with me. I don't deserve it, I know"—he did his best to look contrite—"but truly I'll never so much as ask your name. Look at it from a business point of view. You find the amusement; I, the lunch. And I swear I never meant to insult you. That's all. Will you come?"

She looked up at him keenly, then laughed a little, despite herself. "You're plain spoken. I'll give you credit for that. And

—yes, I'll come, if you'll promise to behave. Here's more plain speaking for you. I want lunch; it'll cost me eighteenpence if I buy it myself, and I haven't many eighteenpences to spare. Therefore I accept your offer, not because I like you or approve of your manners, but because it saves eighteenpence. See?"

"Perfectly. Now we're on even terms. Hi!—you." He hailed a passing cab and helped the girl in. "Prince's."

She gasped. "Oh no!" she said. "I can't allow that. Why, it's fearfully expensive. I won't go there."

"Then go where you please—when the cab stops. I'm going there, and you promised to share my lunch. Of course, if you won't, I can't pull you in by your hair. I meant to go to a quieter place if you hadn't pitched your prospective eighteenpenny lunch in my face."

"Then please do, now. Really and truly, I shall be quite unhappy there. Look at my dress!"

"It looks very nice," Laurence said, eying it.

"Heaven send men eyes! Why, it's a winter frock—spring, anyway. And you want to take me to Prince's in it on a June day. Please—please—go somewhere else." There

was real pleading in her voice in spite of her smiling face.

"How will the Criterion do?"

"No." She shook her head. "I want some grubby little Soho restaurant where nobody'll be well dressed. I thought you men always knew of some little place where the wines are wondrous and the cooking unimpeachable, and you can't see your neighbor for tobacco smoke."

Laurence laughed outright. "Begad! I'm glad I risked your snubbing. No; I can't oblige you in all your requirements, but I can take you to a place where the wines are drinkable, I believe, and the cookery isn't bad. But the rooms are large and too well ventilated to get full of smoke, and the service is unromantically clean. However, it's undeniably in Soho. Will that do?"

"Very nicely, I'm sure. I'll forgive the want of smoke. Where is it?"

Laurence stuck his head out of the window. "Not Prince's. Corner of Rupert Street," he called to the chauffeur; and then, to the girl, "That answers you too, doesn't it?"

They walked together up the shady side of Rupert Street to the restaurant in which he had dined upon the evening of his arrival. By day it proved to be clean and white and

pretty, with snowy napery and brilliant glass upon its tables, and his companion nodded approval. "I like this. The people aren't *too* well dressed, and so I don't feel so much ashamed of myself. They look nice and cheerful, too." She regarded the menu favorably, and at Laurence's bidding set herself to select from the modest *carte du jour*.

Laurence looked around him curiously, his eyes opened at her naïve expressions of pleasure. Yes, the place was cheerful. It had pleased him at his first visit, he remembered; but any place where meals were decently served would have done that then. Since that first evening his lines had been cast in pleasanter places. Were they pleasanter, though? His glance fell on the little happy face beneath the big brown hat. No; he'd be hanged if they were. More expensive—yes. Better food and choicer wines, perhaps. A gourmand might perceive the advantage of being fed by a chef with a world-wide reputation, but who was he, after all, to pick and choose? Was he either gourmand or gourmet?—he who for two years had eaten without complaint, almost without remark, the wretched food that was set before him on a trawler. And those places were stiff—constrained. Well-dressed immorality might enter there,

and welcome, it was true—but after six not even purity itself in any raiment but accepted evening wear. Pah! what a silly sham it all had been.

The girl called his attention to the menu, pointing with an ungloved finger; and though her little hands gave him no clew to her occupation, he saw with satisfaction that they were strong and shapely. Scarcely glancing at the card, he nodded consent to her suggestions, and resumed his inspection of the crowded room. At the next table two bushy-haired Scandinavians—man and maid—talked in low voices. He could catch a word here and there that sounded like Danish, and felt well pleased at the recognition. On the other side a young Jewess vivaciously told a long story to two older women, perhaps her mother and aunt, with bright expression and swift gestures of her hands, the two listeners laughing merrily at the recitation. At half a dozen tables more were Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Italians with their womankind, eating and drinking, smoking and chattering, and unrestrained laughter and tobacco smoke ascended into the air above them. The light-hearted cheerfulness of the place moved Laurence to contentment, and he turned to the girl again with a smile.

"There's plenty of smoking, since you de-

manded it," he said. "I'm sorry the place is so well ventilated."

"I'm not," she answered. "I don't want to be hidden from my neighbors here. Why is it foreigners are always so jolly—so much happier than we English?"

"Thank you," he said. "Is that a compliment to me?"

"You? Oh no. You look quite cheerful now. Do you know, I thought you looked an awful bear this morning."

"Did I? I felt sour, and that's a fact. I've been keeping late hours and playing the fool generally and I suppose it got hold of my liver, or something."

"Moral, don't keep late hours. I don't, if I can help it—and when I do, it's work. I shouldn't have thought you were the sort to play the fool, as you call it, or do any silly things like that."

"Indeed. And what sort—as *you* call it—would you think I am?"

She put her head on one side, looking straight into his eyes—and again came the irresistible suggestion of golden brown butterfly wings.

"I—I'm not sure. I don't think you're a good man—not Sunday-school good, anyhow. I'd rather suspect you of murder than minor peccadilloes. . . . Oh, I don't know—and as

I shan't ever see you again, I can't see that it matters. Can you?"

"No—not if you're never to see me again, as you say. Now what fish are you going to have?"

They chose fish, laughing and chattering merrily over the translation of the menu. *Cabillaud,* he insisted, was cod; she was equally positive it was not. "I don't know what *cabillaud* means," she admitted, "but I do know *morue* is French for codfish."

"Then we'll agree to differ," Laurence decided.

"One would think you knew all there was to know of French," she pouted.

"I know all there is to know of cod, at all events," he said.

"Do you? How?"

"I've been catching the beastly things these last two years."

"You? How queer! But I thought cod were taken on the deep-sea fishery—hundreds of miles from shore—in fishing boats."

"In trawlers. That's so. I was skipper of one until last month," Laurence confessed, and was rewarded by a flash of interest from the brown eyes.

"Were you? How interesting! Fancy, you! I thought you were just an idler. Tell me all about it. Isn't it a rough life?"

"Rough? My faith!" His voice dropped, and under cover of the buzz of talk around them he told her of the dread toil that had soured his life. Because those new bright eyes were upon him, with the girl's own brave individuality behind them, he told his tale strongly and well, dropping the meaningless idioms of daily life from his speech and replacing them by the rude, clear-cut colloquialisms of the north, whenever he deemed them comprehensible to her. And the knowledge—he saw it in her eyes—the knowledge of all that bitter past had meant to him knocked at the door of the girl's heart, and her eyes met his in comradeship—the brave comradeship of toil. Once she put out a hand as though to place it on his own, but, remembering her surroundings, withdrew it. Then Laurence, vowing to himself to move her to that action again, told of Clitheroe's death in gentler speech than had passed his lips for many a day, feeling himself that he had lost one who had loved him. As he had desired, the hand came out and touched his own, but when he saw her lips shake and the moist eyes as she said softly, "Oh, don't! Oh, the pity of it!" he only felt shame in his success.

"And now," he asked, "won't you talk of your work?"

"Me? I'm a writer—of sorts. I write for women's papers generally—fashion notes, short stories, anything I can sell. Sometimes I get reference work—grubbing in the British Museum, you know. I've just done some for Mr. Webster. That's how I came to your rooms this morning. I ought to have done it a fortnight ago, but I've been busy, and so it had to wait. Now he's gone away, and the MS.'ll be hunting him about, and I shall have to wait for my money, bother him!"

"Can't I——?" Laurence began, but silenced himself at the danger-signal in her eyes.

"Certainly not. Thank you, all the same. I'm sorry you should even suggest——"

"You didn't let me suggest anything," Laurence said shortly. Then at the flush in the girl's face, "But I will own I meant to ask you if you'd accept a loan from me. So you didn't jump at a wrong conclusion—and you may look angry, if you like. You'll be more comfortable so. You needn't look upset, anyway."

She glanced at him, half quizzical, half angry.

"You really are—— Do they teach thought-reading on fishing boats? Goodness me! It's half-past two. I must be going. Thank you for the lunch. I'm glad I came.

I've enjoyed it very much." She held out her hand frankly. "No, you can't come with me. I'm in a hurry to keep an appointment. Sit here and finish your smoke. Good-by."

With a handshake and a bright smile she was gone, and Laurence sat and looked at her empty chair, at her crumpled serviette flung upon the table, and the room suddenly became empty, stupid, and uninteresting.

CHAPTER XII

Laurence finished his cigarette, paid his bill, and came out into the sunlight with his head in a whirl. Here was a shattering of ideas! That he, the brute, the unchained danger to all who opposed his desires—What was his last nickname? Lucifer? A pretty testimony to disposition that!—to think that he, after laughing and chattering over a lunch with a girl he had never seen till that day—whose very name he did not know—should find his Armida's garden dusty and dry, his Dead Sea apples more full of bitter ash even than he had before guessed them to be. He had come to London intent on folly and debauchery, and in all things had done as he had vowed to do. Tired of the game he certainly had been only that morning, but not tired with this fullness of disgust. And all because two brown eyes had looked into his own, and a soft voice had said, "Don't! Oh, don't! Oh, the pity of it!"

And now to reconstruct his philosophy. What was he next to do? He walked down Shaftesbury Avenue with his eyes on the ground, heedless of the passers-by.

High clamor around him at the corner of Windmill Street brought him back to earth, to find a horse's head nuzzling at his left ear, its sprawling forehoofs close to his feet. The cabman was leaning over from his seat, dragging at the reins, and whistling himself into a state of apoplexy. He stepped back, and the cab drove on, the raging driver flinging a curse at him as he passed. Laurence replied with a jibe that brought the man round in his seat with a jump, his face one red picture of astonishment, and then, feeling soothed, passed behind the wheels with all the honors of war.

No man could think here, in this noise and traffic. He would go home, and smoke—and think things over. He looked at his watch. Nearly three, and he had an appointment with the Lady of the Shoe at half-past. Never mind her. She could wait an hour. He would go home to New Cavendish Street and think things over—make up his mind as to what he should do in this new and unforeseen state of affairs.

He went up the stairway and entered his rooms bemused with thought. A little leather bag lay upon the table. By all that was lucky!—that must be hers! He pounced upon it like a hawk, and emptied it upon the table. It contained a handkerchief, a purse, and a

memorandum and address book. He examined the handkerchief first. It told him little, being but a little workaday square of cambric without lace or other adornment, and with the monogram M. S. or S. M.—he could not tell which—embroidered in one corner. The memorandum book helped him no more. A few addresses, mostly of editorial offices, filled its pages. His own, under the name of "H. S. Webster," was among them. Some names of books, with page numbers, and that was all. "I've got to have a look at your purse, then, young lady," he said, and opened it.

Fourteen shillings in silver, some odd coppers, a check for two guineas, half a dozen priced slips from drapers' shops, and—happy Fortune!—a card-case! There lay the answer to his unspoken question.

"Marion Stewart"; and in the lower corner was the address: "Baron's Court Road, West Kensington." Joy! He waved the card-case aloft, exulting silently; then repacked the little bag's belongings, sat down and ineffectually tried to smoke.

First, he must write to Harper and ask that the month given him for decision might be extended to six or even seven weeks. That gave him a clear month in which to make the

girl's acquaintance. Next, he must cut the whole of the set he had been with for the last three weeks. He would quarrel with the fair Constance—whose name so belied her fame—that very afternoon. Next, how much money had he got? He fetched his bank- and check-books, adding up the sums on the counter-foils of the latter to subtract from the last balance shown in his favor.

"Thirty-five quid! Um. Cheering!" he said, and emptied his pockets on the table. "And seven's forty-two. A hundred at Dwyer's, less a month's rent. Any commission, I wonder? No! Pat'll make the Webster man pay that. Eighty and forty's a hundred and twenty. I'll get back to Leith with most of the hundred in my pocket. That's something towards setting up house, anyway.

"Oh! what a perishing fool I have been. Will she have me? She's *got* to—the little brown darling. I'll make her, by gad!" He stood up and stretched himself, delighting in his strength. "I could pick her up in one hand—I'll do it yet, just to show her. And now to write Clement Harper, and then to take tea with Constance the inconstant. 'It's well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new.'"

He locked the little handbag away in his

bedroom. In the drawer in which he placed it lay the fragment of stone he had declared should act as death's head at his feast, forgotten this last fortnight. "I'll take it with me now," he said to himself. "It'll remind me of what's taken its place in the drawer—if I want reminding."

He wrote to Harper, asking him to wire reply, and went downstairs, slamming his door behind him. "That young lady who called this morning left her purse behind, Ferguson," he told the hall porter. "If she calls, ask her to leave her address, and I'll return it."

"Yes, sir. Are you expecting her to call, sir?"

"No. I don't know, though; she might." He reflected rapidly that in all probability she would call when her afternoon's work was done. "Here's my key. If she comes, show her in and ask her to wait. Mrs. Ferguson can make her a cup of tea. I shall be back about six." He went off to post his letter and make his adieux to his discarded fair.

But it is one thing to resolve to discard a woman and very much another thing to find the parting seriously discommoded by the presence of a third person. Moreover, if one is possessed by the firm idea that that third person only waits to step into one's own

shoes, there is a tendency to delay the parting awhile. A Final Parting, to the male mind, should be a ceremony decently attended by regrets, even by tears—at least on the part of the deserted maiden; and it is an intensely irritating perversion of this order of things to find that, despite some polite expressions of sorrow, the said deserted maiden, so far from bursting into tears and clinging despondency, shows a disagreeable readiness to part good friends and to turn the light of her smiles on another man who, again, appears perfectly prepared to act as a willing substitute.

He found his Constance at tea with another admirer, a youth who held some obscure position in the Geological Survey. Laurence glowered at him sulkily, scarcely vouchsafing a word at their introduction.

"And now for tea, Mr. Bear," said the lady cheerfully. "You won't take sugar, of course."

"Always do," Laurence growled. "Why not now?"

"You look quite too perfectly sweet without it," was the reply, at which the hated rival laughed maliciously.

"And have you found my shoe?" she asked, a little nervously, to change the conversation. Not for nothing had she known

and borne with Laurence's furious temper during the last three weeks.

"Yes, I have."

"Where is it?"

"If it's where I left it, it's in my fireplace," Laurence said coarsely. "That's where I chucked it when I found it."

"Very thoughtful of you, I'm sure. And what are you going to give me to replace it?"

"Nothing," said Laurence the brute. "You shouldn't leave your things about."

"I won't—in your rooms," the lady replied with meaning, and turned her conversation to the other man, thanking him gently for some present he had made her that afternoon before Laurence's arrival. For his greater chastening it was produced, and she held it up before him, inviting admiration.

It was a little pendant of good modern design, gold, set with a matrix turquoise and hanging opals. She dangled it before his nose and he leaned back to avoid it, pushing his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets as he did so. One of them came in contact with his fragment of Iceland stone, and he pulled it out and threw it on the little tea-tray, greatly endangering the fragile china.

"I wouldn't give that stone for all the turquoises ever dug," he said—and was im-

mediately ashamed at heart for the sentiment underlying his words. To think of Her memory in this place!

The young geologist picked it up, glanced at it, and replaced it.

"I wouldn't give much for your knowledge of stones, then," he said superciliously. "If you could trade malachite for turquoise, weight for weight, you'd make money."

"Trade how much?" asked Laurence. "What do you call it?"

"That stone of yours? Malachite."

"What's it worth?"

"I really couldn't tell you. I'm not a Brummagem jeweler."

Laurence sat upright in his chair. "What —the—deuce," he said, "has that stone got to do with Brummagem jewelry?"

"That's all it's fit for. You seem to have an exaggerated idea of its value."

"Perhaps so. What's it worth a ton?"

"A ton, eh?" He laughed. "You don't buy malachite by the ton, my dear sir. Might as well buy precious stones—really precious ones, I mean—by the pound instead of the carat."

"Look here"—Laurence began to get excited—"what is malachite, anyway?"

The young man entered into a learned disquisition on copper ores and their deposits

—"Something after the manner in which stalagmites are formed," he concluded, emerging from a mist of technical terms.

Laurence looked at the woman sitting gracefully between them. Her face, turned towards the speaker, showed polite meaningless interest, but he could see that every word had passed unheeded.

"Is the stuff of any real value?" he asked.

"In large slabs—yes. The Emperor of Russia, I believe, presented a pair of doors to the late Queen that were considered priceless. In small pieces like that—no, not much. As I tell you, it's very largely used for cheap jewelry, being of a fine green color with variegated surface. It polishes well, too. I can't tell you what it's worth. You must ask a practical jeweler."

Laurence had made his adieux, with some incoherent promise to meet the pair at dinner that evening, had taken the staircase three steps at a time, and hailed a cab in Tottenham Court Road within three minutes of the youth's last words.

"Bond Street," he said excitedly. "No: first jeweler's you come to. Drive like mad!"

The cab drew up only a short way past the Tube station, and Laurence was across the pavement and into the shop almost before it

had stopped. He placed his precious possession on the counter.

"What's that worth?" he demanded.

The assistant picked it up and looked at it curiously. "It's—it's——?" he said, and looked at Laurence for information.

"Malachite, man! Malachite. I don't want you to tell me what it is, but what it's worth—by the pound, say."

The assistant really could not say. He would call the proprietor. Would Laurence have the goodness to take a seat?

No, he wouldn't. He preferred to pace the floor, to and fro, his brain spinning in the endeavor to see how far this had bearing on his new plans. One thing was certain—the jewelry suggested it. He would cover Marion —yes, Marion—the prospective owner of malachite mines, or quarries, or whatever they were, could call any woman by her Christian name—he would cover Marion with jewels, he promised himself. The little hands should be weighted down with their flashing burden; tiaras of great price should lie on the cloudy hair, even though all of them must dim with shame for their dullness whenever her eyes laughed or grew moist with tears.

His castles in the air were rudely shaken at the fussy entrance of the proprietor, an-

noyed at being disturbed from his afternoon of quiet.

"Malachite, sir!" he fumed. "This is a jeweler's establishment, sir—not a lapidary's. If you want to ascertain the value of such rubbish as that you had better go to a stone-mason, sir. Malachite, indeed! *Good*-afternoon." He retreated furiously, and Laurence, somewhat subdued, sought his cab.

"This is not the class of crib I want," he told the driver. "I want a little cheap jeweler's and watch repairer's, where they sell Brummagem goods. And if it's kept by a Jew, so much the better. He won't exaggerate values if he thinks I want to sell," he added to himself.

The chauffeur reflected a moment. "Right O, sir!" he said. "I fancy I know the clawss o' plyce you mean. Jump in, sir."

He drove up Tottenham Court Road, turning to the left this time, and halting before just such a shop as Laurence had demanded. A score of shabby silver watches hung in its low-browed front, and the shelving slope beneath them was sparsely covered with little ornaments of the same metal, mostly cross-shaped brooches, with an occasional crucifix or two here and there among them.

Laurence entered. "Do you buy malachite?" he asked of a man seated behind the counter.

The shopman removed a watchmaker's glass from his eye and stood up carefully, gathering together the corners of his leather apron with one hand as he did so. He turned one ear towards Laurence.

"Eh? What sye?" he asked, with the purest Cockney accent.

"Do—you—buy—malachite?" Laurence almost shouted.

He shook his head. "Not much nowadays. There ain't no demand for it in the south. They sell more north—in the manufacturin' districks."

"What's its value?"

"I 'ardly know—'olesyle. In the old dyes, when it was all Russian malachite an' fash-'nable, it used to be worth five-an'-twenty bob a pahnd. Nah they get it from Austry-lier—and the price is gone dahn 'orrible. I wouldn't give yer more'n five shillin's a pahnd for it. 'Ow much 'ave yer got ter sell?"

Laurence extracted the fragment from his pocket and handed it over the counter.

"This all?" He threw it into a scales, where it just turned the quarter pound. "Give yer a tanner for it. Yer see, it'll lose

'arf its weight in cuttin' and polishin'—an' there ain't but little demand——"

"I wouldn't sell it for twenty pounds," Laurence cried.

"Then yer must be balmy," the man said calmly, sitting down and resuming his glass. "I don't mind springin' tuppence more, but——"

His voice died away into an incoherent whine behind Laurence's fleeing footsteps. He almost danced across the pavement to his cab.

"My man," he said, "this is an occasion. You drive me where I can get a great, long, beautiful drink. And you're to have one too. Forty, if you like."

The man grinned. "If I like, sir! Wotto! But 'oo'll look after my keb?"

"Never mind the cab. I'll buy it. Hurry up and drive me where I can get a decent drink. That's your job. Skip."

He drank a whisky and soda at a gulp and sent another out to the chauffeur, bidding him wait. On the back of an envelope he made a few rough calculations in pencil, and then ordered another drink while he checked his figures.

"Five bob a pound—call it four. Four bob a pound is a hundred and twelve times four bob for a hundredweight. P'r'aps it's

Troy, though. A hundred times four bob—that's twenty quid. Twenty times twenty quid is four hundred. Saints above us! Four hundred quid a ton! Why didn't I live in the happy days before Australian goods spoiled the market—when it was twenty-five bob a pound? Never mind: enough's as good as a feast. Four hundred quid a ton, less expenses of quarrying and freight. Call it three hundred quid, just for fun. And perhaps this chap was bluffing. He sprung twopence more on his sixpence when I wouldn't sell, bless his heart. Here's to him. I must have one more drink while I make sure I'm not making a fool's paradise for myself. Oh ho! and not two hours ago I wrote Clement Harper to keep my place in the office open for a fortnight longer. I'll wire him to go to Blazes. No, I won't, though. If he hadn't sold this ground to my father, p'r'aps I should never have gone to Uthlid—never have kicked off this precious souvenir of woe. Besides, I should never have got to sea at all.

"How am I to get hold of those shares? Don't suppose they're worth a cent, market price now. I must go slow—devilish slow. Mighty gay job for me if anybody smells a rat. And there'll be guinea-pig shares, too. Bought at a quid and chucked into the waste-

paper basket, most likely. But I'll get them easily enough. Such are of bankrupt fathers dearest to make wealth. The thieves! They'll give, I bet. But they'll give the wrong side of their mouths, when My dynamite has blown My love to glory, and My window are beating My melancholy out on the gravels. My gravels too, perhaps, after a bit. And My Marion shall wear the My precious sample in the middle of a diamond tiara, as big as the Marble Arch.

That rotten whisky's laying hold of me. I'll go home and dress for dinner and wire Pat to come. I shall be able to ask him questions about the explosives. Must be careful, though. It won't do to give the show away, even to him."

He sent the wire, but on the way home an awful fear had laid hold on him. Supposing the rats or lice, or whatever the deposit ought to be called, were only a tiny patch? But the memory of the hundred bags of fragments beneath Child's sank somewhat reassured him. There must be more below. A mixture deposit would have crumbled into thinner pieces. He wished he had asked the geologist for his explanation all over again. He remembered something about "copper sulphates." That must mean a combination of copper and sulphur. Sulphur! What was it

CHAPTER XIII

"Will you kindly let me have my purse?" Her face was impassive as a statue's.

"Yes—of course. In a minute; it's only in the next room. But do sit down. I want to talk to you. I——"

"My purse." Laurence himself could have given the order with no more of curt authority.

"But——"

"Will you get my purse, or shall I call the hall porter?" she demanded, flushed with anger, stamping her little foot.

Laurence turned and walked to the door. Perfectly sober as he was, he knew the girl's eyes were upon him, and solely because he took care for every footstep he lurched as he passed the table. When he reached the bedroom he was in a state bordering on frenzy. Taking the bag from the drawer in which he had left it, he returned to the living room, placing it upon the table and crossing the room to the fireplace.

"There's your purse," he said; and the deadly distinctness of his words only confirmed the girl's suspicions, so careful was he to avoid the slightest slip. "There's your purse, and there's the door, and here am I—on the other side of the room. If you wish, you can pick it up and walk straight down the stairs. Nobody'll interfere with you.

"But I beg of you to stay where you are and hear me out. My—my circumstances have changed entirely since I saw you at midday. And as they concern—as I hope they may concern you a little—I want you to hear what I have to say. It's—it's your business as well as my own—at least, I want to make it so."

She took a watch from her belt. "Providing you stand just where you are, I'll give you three minutes to tell your tale," she said coldly.

"It may take more than three minutes, but I'll promise to stay where I am"; and he looked at her appealingly.

"Go on," she said. "You've lost a quarter of a minute already."

Laurence laughed uneasily. "Very well, then. Here goes. Tell me if anything isn't clear.

"I told you I'd been in the North Sea fishery. That's true—nearly two years of it, worse luck. Last April my employer told me he intended to remove me from the fleet and put me into the office. I said I wouldn't go there—that I preferred the fleet. It's—it's a wretched life—a blackguardly life,—but it seemed to me better than making any change. I had got into the groove and meant to stay there, you see.

"But he gave me no choice. He said I was growing into a blackguard and a brute—which was true—and that whether I went into the office or not he would discharge me from the trawler I was on. He would keep a place open in the office for me for a month—if I didn't choose to take it, then I could shift for myself. My father was a friend of his, and he said he'd let me go to the bad no longer.

"I had some money saved—about three hundred pounds—and I made up my mind to spend it as fast as I could, and go back to him broke to the world. If he couldn't let me go to the bad on the boats he couldn't very well let me go there ashore, and I reckoned he'd give in and let me go back to the fleet if I showed him plainly that I hadn't any money and wouldn't work ashore. Do you follow me?"

The girl nodded, and glanced at the watch lying in the hollow of her hand. "Half of the three minutes is gone," she said without emotion.

"So I came here and played the fool and spent the money—the best part of it, at all events. And only this morning I was thinking how sick I was of it all when you came into the room. Then we had lunch together; and when I came back I wrote Harper—

that's my late employer—to keep the place open in the office for another month."

He paused, and she glanced at the watch again. "Well?" she said. Her tone was devoid of the slightest interest.

"Well—that was because—— But there's more before I come to that.

"This afternoon I've had good news. I'm rich, I believe. It may be just a few hundreds, or it may be thousands and thousands of pounds."

"A legacy?" Only a shadow of polite inquiry was in her voice—no trace of interest or curiosity.

"Yes. A—a legacy—of a sort. I haven't any particulars. Don't know in the least what it's worth. But anyhow there's the billet in Harper's office—that's a cert."

"I'm glad you've decided to accept it," she said gravely. "It seems a pity for a man to go to the bad. And I'm glad to hear of your legacy. I hope it may turn out to be a good one. And now, will you kindly tell me where this rigmarole concerns me?" She returned the watch to her belt and glanced at the purse on the table.

Laurence flushed to the roots of his hair, stammering like a schoolboy.

"I—I asked Harper to give me the extra

month because—because I wanted opportunity to make your acquaintance."

"And why?" Her manner was perfectly composed and the little head was poised erect in slight scorn.

"I—I—— Oh, d——n it! I want to marry you," he said.

She picked up her purse and looked at him steadily.

"I have already made as much of *your* acquaintance as I desire," she said, very calmly. "You led off by insulting me in the street—a good beginning. You atoned for that—or I condoned it—when we lunched together. On the same day you take advantage of my carelessness in leaving my purse in your rooms to insult me again. I won't tell you what I think of you—indeed, I'm at a loss for words. 'Blackguard and brute,' you said your late employer called you. He chooses his language better than his servants.

"I had no right to lunch with you—fool that I was. But I've done nothing to deserve this drunken insult. If you ever had womenkind of your own, I hope when you are sober you will reflect what this has meant for me. Good-afternoon."

She turned to the door, but Laurence, maddened, was across the room in two strides and had her by the wrist.

"You—you shan't go like this," he cried. "I tell you I—I know your address, and I *will* see you again."

She looked up fearlessly, but her eyes dropped at the blaze in his own.

"How did you find that out?" she asked.

He released her. Knowing he was forfeiting the last faint claim to her favor, he yet told the truth.

"I opened your purse," he admitted.

"Ah!" She looked him up and down coldly and disdainfully, and turning to the table, emptied bag and purse on to the cloth, counting her poor change before his eyes. 'Thirteen—fourteen and nine. Thank you," she said. " I'm glad to find you stop at petty theft."

Though raging at the imputation, Laurence noticed that her hand was steady as she swept back the coins into the bag, and admiration of her courage rushed over him like a wave. She curtseyed to him before reaching her hand to the door.

"Or—perhaps you were afraid," she said, with a little sneer. "Taking money is a matter for the police, you see. Insulting a woman isn't."

Furious anger—and something else; the light movements of her graceful figure, the

curve of her cheek and neck as she had stooped over the table—drove him mad for the moment. As quick as lightning he had her again by the shoulder. "This is a punishable offense," he cried, choking, and kissed her fair upon the lips. "And now prosecute me. I shan't deny it."

Struggling, she struck him twice savagely upon the mouth with her little clenched hand; and then her body, obedient to his hold, yielded to his strong arm and was drawn closer to his breast.

"Oh, coward—coward!" she wailed softly. "And I alone. Oh! is there no man in you? —I thought you were a man." Her head was bowed and she was crying to herself in little lengthened sobs.

He placed her in a chair and returned to the mantelpiece, leaning his elbows on the shelf, his head between his hands. All his

anger had given place to black shame—to despair. Fool—fool and beast! How could he ever hope to make amends for this?

The girl was the first to recover herself.

She sat upright and wiped her eyes before rising to her feet. Then—

"I'm sorry," she said. "I had no right to insult you about the money as I did"; and without another word she was gone.

Laurence took a step towards the closing door, but, on swift reflection, stayed himself. He could do nothing further now that would help him, for certain; and as the memory of the whole unlucky interview returned to torture him he cursed his ill-luck—his folly—aloud.

Not a quarter of an hour before he had come up the staircase full of joy and hope, and in that quarter of an hour had wrecked his own plans as fully and completely as though he had come there for the purpose. True, he knew her name and address, but what chance had he of ever getting on good terms—on even bare terms of acquaintance—with her again? He thought of their friendly parting at Rupert Street in the morning, and the memory moved him to more smothered blasphemy.

He raged ineffectually up and down the

room, until the clock, striking seven, reminded him that though he had very successfully pulled his castle in Spain about his ears, he yet had an appointment with Dwyer at dinner. He dressed hastily and hurried off, his face calm enough, but his mind in a tumult of rage and despair.

Dwyer soon remarked upon it. "Cheerful bird you are to-night," he said. "What's wrong? Connie given you the go-by? I notice young Farrant's been pretty much in evidence lately."

Laurence briefly consigned young Farrant and his inamorata to unspeakable depths. "As a matter of fact, I believe I promised to dine with the pair of 'em to-night," he concluded. "Forget where, though."

"And so you wired to me—as a *pis aller,* eh? Complimentary, I'm sure."

"Don't drivel," Laurence interrupted. "I wanted to see you—on business, in a way. I want to buy some shares, Pat; and I haven't much money to spare, and I want it done on the quiet—dead quiet, see?"

Dwyer nodded. "Not much money to spare, eh?" he remarked. "What about that pile you were retiring with?"

"My pile—all that's left of it—amounts to about a hundred and twenty quid, of which you've eighty in your care."

"A hundred," Dwyer corrected him.

"Less twenty for a month's rent. I shall leave the flat next week. And I've about forty quid besides. When I came to town my 'pile' amounted to about three-fifty, and I've blued more than half of it. I meant to get rid of the lot in evil living, but now I've changed my mind, and I'm going to devote the rest to good works."

"Go on. Expound."

"Do you remember a very shady bit of work of my father's—doing an old Somerset sea-captain out of his savings with a bogus sulphur-mining scheme?"

"In Iceland, was it? I fancy I do remember something of it."

"Any idea what shares were sold?"

Dwyer shook his head. "Only debentures, I believe. Nobody'd be fool enough to look at ordinaries in a wild-cat scheme like that. Six per cent. debentures they were, I remember. That ought to have opened the guileless sailor-man's eyes."

"There must have been a few guinea-pig shares, I suppose?"

"Of course. I can easily find out all about that, if you want to know."

"I do. And I want to buy 'em. You know how I stand now, but your tale had better be that I've come into a pile, and being honest

—you needn't grin, fool—being honest, I want to pay off some of my father's liabilities.

"And I want the debentures too—every scrap of shares in the Company. Can you manage it on a hundred and twenty quid?"

"Lord knows. Of course the stuff's worth nothing now. I remember your father's pal Harper went into the box and described the ground. But inquiries mean a jump in price immediately. Supposing I can't rope it all in for the sum you name?"

"Do your best. Remember, ordinaries first, and as many debentures as you can get afterwards. Shouldn't be surprised if the ordinary scrip's been used for lighting fires long ago. But you'll be able to work it somehow. Get the transfers—or what d'you call 'em—made clearly to me, and the scrip can look after itself."

"All right. Am I in this too?"

"That's as you please. I tell you straight, it's the wickedest gamble I ever put my money in. I can guarantee that—— No, I can't guarantee anything. Only I'm broke, anyhow. As I've been going on I shall be on my uppers in a fortnight, and it simply means that I'm going to barter a fortnight's spree—and I'm sick of spree, if you want to know—for the thinnest possible chance of something turning up on that land."

"Is it sulphur, Laurie?" Dwyer asked insinuatingly.

"No, it isn't sulphur; and if you guess for a month of Sundays you'll be none the wiser, for I'll lie even if you guess right. You go and spend my hundred and twenty quid on as many shares as you can get. If you can get the lot by a deposit now and full payment in twelve months' time, do it that way. In twelve months I shall either be broke to glory or shall be able to pay up. If you've got twenty quid lying idle, and you'd like to play ducks and drakes with it, you can put it in as well. But I warn you beforehand that I'm staking nothing—only a fortnight's spree I don't want—and likely you've better uses for your money. That's all."

"Thanks. I think I'll leave it alone. Give me a week to ask questions and find out what I can. This is Thursday. Come round to the office a week to-day, and in the meantime I'll find out the guinea-pigs and approach 'em warily, and I'll also see what information is available about the debentures. But, see you—I've eighty quid of yours in hand. I spend no more than that. Your ways are the least thing too erratic for me. What on earth prompted you to come and chuck away your little capital in this way?"

"I was sick of things, Pat, and I wanted a

change. That's all. I'll tell you more about it some day."

"Please yourself. And now, what are we going to do? A theater?"

"Not me. I'm going home to be good. I've had a tiring day, and a late night last night—and another the night before—and the night before that—and so on, *ad infinitum*. I'm going to bed to sleep till Thursday. By-by."

"Good-night, my virtuous one. Sleep well," and the two men shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XIV

By ten next morning Laurence had finished his breakfast, declined two invitations, and burned another unanswered—this last written on gray paper with a demure white monogram on the envelope flap—and was on his way to West Kensington. Prompted by a new motive of economy, he traveled by underground, and after a wait at Gloucester Road was delivered at West Kensington station just before eleven o'clock. Fate ordained that he should meet Marion Stewart at the entrance to the booking office, and the draughty entry straightway became a sunlit Fairyland.

He stopped to speak to her, hat in hand; but, deliberately looking through him, she passed on down the stairway with pink cheeks and head erect. Wickedly congratulating himself on her flushed face, he followed her to the platform, and there commenced a lame apology.

Very quietly and gravely she heard him out. Then, inclining her head, "And I owe you an apology too," she said. "I had no

right to behave as I did. Please believe I am sorry—and now, good-by."

"May I hope to see you again?" he asked, holding out his hand.

"I think not." She altogether disregarded his outstretched hand. "Here is my train. Good-morning,"—and with a slammed door and the guard's whistle she was whirled away.

Laurence could have despaired at her impassive demeanor, and the sunlight on the platform turned cold and gray on the moment. "But the game's never lost till it's won—by somebody," he said to himself; and lighting a cigarette, he re-ascended the stairway, crossed the bridge, and made his way to her address in Baron's Court Road.

"Have you any rooms to let?" he asked of the diminutive servant who answered the door.

"I'll see, sir. What nime, please?"

"Averil," mumbled Laurence, his cigarette between his lips, and then, seeing she still held the door open, threw it away and waited in the narrow hall.

The landlady, a cleanly, large-boned Scotswoman, admitted that she had a room vacant —a bed-sitting-room on the second floor— and showed it to him. Though plainly furnished, he was glad to find it as spotlessly

clean as the landlady's own person; and, surprised, found himself none the less pleased because she saw fit to subject him to rigid scrutiny, and even to a catechism that in parts might have been deemed impertinent.

Such a severe examination before permission to reside beneath the same roof with his lady-love was all as it should be. Recognizing the Lowland accent in the woman's speech, he informed her that he was from Leith—had come to London for a month's holiday—and was rewarded for his candor by an immediate access of friendliness on her part, and after ten minutes' conversation was accepted as a lodger.

"I ha' to be careful, sir, ye see," she said. "I ha' ithers stayin' in the house—a young leddy forbye."

Laurence found himself audibly and cordially assenting to her careful selection, and promising to take possession of the room on the following Monday, he returned to New Cavendish Street.

That afternoon he bought a selection of women's papers in High Street, Marylebone, and spent the remainder of the day until dusk turning over page after page dealing with the mysteries of the toilet and the nursery, in the insane hope of being able to recognize amid the columns of nonsense some

approach to the bravely independent style in which he conceived Marion Stewart must write. He walked to Rupert Street for dinner, carrying one of the periodicals with him. During the meal he glanced at it from time to time, until the futility of his behavior was revealed to him, and he flung it under the table.

"Chiffon and dress patterns—titled brats and tomfoolery," he growled. "Lord! and she's in that—and how in the name of Heaven I'm to get her out of it He only knows." He thought of her coldly polite bearing at West Kensington that morning, and despaired. "If she only hated me," he groaned in spirit, with a too certain knowledge of her sex. "If only she hated me, I'd stand a chance. But now I'm just beneath her feet—she's as polite to me as she would be to a flunkey—just the same. I'm a blackguard yokel, up in London for a drunken spree—that's all." He walked home through the lights and clamor of Regent Street in that fine state of soft melancholy peculiar to despairing lovers, and, cherishing his cares, had the benefit of a night's sleeplessness, for the first time since the wretched days when the inquiry into his father's affairs was taking place. He found this occasion no more enviable than those had been. As he tossed to and fro, or

lay still, staring unwinking into the darkness, pictures came to torture him over and over again.

Marion, her hand in some unknown man's, her eyes looking into his as they had never looked into his own; Marion, being kissed by another man—or sitting, wife, on another man's knee. And then the knowledge of this great hungry city came on him, bringing cold perspiration to his forehead. A lonely woman—worse, a lonely pretty woman—and temptation on every side of her. Of course, that couldn't hurt her—he pictured her calm eyes as she rebuked him in Chancery Lane the day before—but she might fall ill, or get into some other man's hands. Black shame was added to sickening fear as he remembered her, struggling, in his own arms.

"This'll never do," he decided aloud, and paddling into the other room on his bare feet, he switched on the light to look for something to read. On the table lay the women's papers, and he took a bundle of them with him back to bed for re-reading, reason, preternaturally alert in the restless stillness of the night, crying, "Fool!" at every step. He dozed off to sleep about five, and rose in the morning haggard and unrested, more than half angry with the impulse that had

prompted him to litter his bed with the nonsensical magazines.

All the morning he mooned about idly, but in the afternoon restlessness and the fear of another wakeful night sent him to the river to seek comfort. He sailed on a steamer as far down the Thames as it would take him, returning on another to Chelsea. The motion of the boat, the fresh air, and sight of the mighty ocean-going traffic of the lower reaches calmed him somewhat, and he returned to his rooms and slept well and heavily.

On Sunday he went to church. Remembering a red brick Gothic erection at the end of Baron's Court Road, he arrayed himself gorgeously and went there, cherishing vain hopes. His landlady passed him as he stood waiting in the porch after service, but there was no sign of the face he looked for. On the way home he reflected that the landlady might mention that she had seen him in such godly surroundings, and derived some pleasure from the idea until he recalled that Marion did not as yet know he was to be her fellow-lodger. By nightfall he was again in a grievous state of depression, and the pavement of Oxford Street—desiring music and lights, he went to Frascati's for dinner—did little towards cheering him. It brought

back his first impression of a roaring torrent flowing through the streets—this evening of the Day of Rest. Brave he knew Marion was, and fearless, but who could say where such a straw might be swept unconsidered in this flood of life? Evidences of the broken débris of the stream were plain in view at every step he took. Accident of cataract and shoal everywhere beset the course of the current, and who was she—though she was Queen of all his world—that she should be immune from accident? And he—the one that was strong enough to float by her side, fighting the waters for her sake—he had himself put gulfs between them by his own cursed folly.

He went home sweating and shaking, but having some fragments of common-sense still remaining, reflected that his fears for her could help her little, and insured a good night's sleep by bottled beer and a pipe of sailor's cake tobacco, a fragment of which he found in the coat which he had worn on his arrival in London.

The next day he quitted the flat for good, and was installed amid the poorer surroundings of Baron's Court Road. Though anticipating tribulation, he yet embarked upon his course methodically. Timing his departure with care, he was fortunate enough to meet her at the door as she left the house

in the morning, and her face showed unbounded astonishment.

"I'm lodging with Mrs. Jardine," he explained, discarding the conventional "Good-morning."

"You!" Her tone told nothing.

"Yes. You know how I got your address. Will—will you try and forget that? I want to see more of you."

"But this—this amounts to persecution."

"Before Heaven, I mean no such thing," Laurence said earnestly. "But I must and will see more of you, if you'll allow me. You haven't encouraged me, you know well enough. You needn't reproach yourself with that. Can't you try and think that circumstances have been against me, up to now?"

"Circumstances?" was all she said.

"Yes, circumstances. I wasn't drunk; I hadn't been drinking—at least, only a very little—when you called the other afternoon for your purse. You maddened me. . . . No: for Heaven's sake don't start apologizing again for what you said. I richly deserved it, and it makes me hot and ashamed to hear you say you're sorry for it.

"Perhaps I was responsible—of course, I know I was—for the whole unlucky business; but I could have kicked myself when you'd gone. I told you how things were—how I'd

been playing the fool——" He caught a glimpse of her face as she walked beside him, and was warned, if only by the flutter of an eyelid, that he was on dangerous ground—"I didn't know you then. And now, please, believe me, I want to pull up, and you can help me, if you will."

"How?"

"By forgetting all I said or did in that unlucky quarter of an hour, and allowing me to—to be a friend of yours."

"Am I to forget *all* you said?"

"Yes—no. I'll sail under no false colors. I said I wanted to marry you. I want to be a friend of yours now with that end in view."

"But, how ridiculous! I don't even know you—and you don't know me."

"I don't want——"

"No. Of course you don't. There's a man all over. You don't want to know more of me—only to marry me. Oh, you're mad!"

"I am—a bit."

"I'm glad you've the grace to admit it. Now, listen to me." She turned on the pavement outside the suburban station, and held up a finger admonishingly. "I met you for the first time five days ago. Our first meeting was accidental. Then—I don't want to rub it in—you showed your respect and admiration for me by stopping me in Chancery

Lane and asking me to lunch. I accepted because it saved me the price of a lunch. No; I won't tell stories either. I accepted because I was sorry for you—your eyes looked tired and sad—and, besides, I'm a writer, and all types of people are interesting, and you had a brown, healthy skin, and looked like a strong man who had lived in the open air. It seemed strange that you should be idling as you were, and so I thought perhaps you would be useful material. I'll admit I congratulated myself on that lunch. Your stories of the North Sea were very interesting; you told them well, and I liked you.

"Then—forgive me for recalling it—came that dreadful time in your rooms, and I was shocked beyond measure. You *had* been drinking—I don't know how much, and I don't care—and you treated me—— How did you treat me? Do you want me to remind you?"

Laurence looked at his boots. "No," he said shortly.

"Now I put it to you. If anyone had served you so, and then came seeking your further acquaintance, how would you feel? Remember all I know of you is that you were a fisherman; that you've come into money; that you have been living a life of folly—and perhaps worse; and that you've grievously

insulted me. That you are obviously an educated man only makes matters worse. And now, can you blame me for wishing to see no more of you?''

''Lord knows I can't,'' Laurence said humbly. ''You think that I'm just a drunken, vicious brute of the lower orders who has come to London to spend money he would be better without. I know that, and it's true, worse luck. That's pretty much what I am. But, see here, I wasn't always a fisherman or a brute either. It was no fault of mine that I had to take to the life and live among brutes that have left their stamp on me. And now I want—I really do want to reform. And you can help me—nobody else can.''

''But how? Why should I? You've talked of marrying me. If I allow you to be friendly with me you'll have that idea at the back of your head all the time, and when you find out the truth you'll only go back to your bad ways again.''

''The truth?'' Laurence asked.

''Yes, the truth. I don't want to marry you. I don't want to marry anybody, as far as that goes. But you—great heavens! man, I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth. A man who has behaved as you have—a man who gives the impression

of being strong, and yet can't cut himself adrift from a horribly unclean life without the help of a woman he hasn't known for five days! . . . Oh, I know what you're going to say! That it shows the strength of your feelings. It doesn't. It shows your weak—your babyish—want of self-control. If ever I marry it will be a man who could be my master—not one I have to lead. And besides," she finished lamely, with a little nervous, womanly laugh, "you're dark, and I prefer fair men. I'm dark myself, you see. So please put the idea out of your head. I could never marry you. Never—never—never!"

Laurence's self-conceit was returning. He congratulated himself on arriving at the dignity of so lengthy, so temperate a reprimand, but his tongue was bitted as he answered.

"Then we'll say no more about it. But now, marrying and giving in marriage being tabooed, may I repeat my first request? I still have nearly a month to spend in town, and I should like to see more of you. Will you allow me to be on friendly terms with you—always understanding that it leads to nothing else? You spoke of persecution just now. If you feel that, you have only to beckon the nearest policeman."

She looked up, and there was a faint sus-

picion of a smile in her eyes and about the corners of her lips.

"We've met three times, and have suggested calling in the police on two of them," she replied. "That looks promising, doesn't it?"

Laurence laughed. "Unlucky circumstances, as I told you. Now, please, your answer."

"Very well. I go up West generally on Mondays and Fridays. On those days you may see me this far. On other days I won't promise, but providing that you behave—I beg your pardon. I'm sure you will, now. Won't you?" Laurence contented himself with a nod—"I won't promise, but Mrs. Jardine has a season ticket at Earl's Court, and we go there to listen to the band in the evenings. If she has no objection, you may come as well—sometimes. And now I must go. You've nearly made me lose my train as it is. Good-by." She held out her hand, and Laurence took it, echoing her farewell, and went back to his room, walking on air.

CHAPTER XV

For the next three blissful days Laurence saw his divinity at least once in every twenty-four hours, and his heart sang pæans. On two occasions he was privileged to go with her on her evening promenade in the Exhibition grounds, once in the company of Mrs. Jardine, the landlady, and once alone. Fired with the determination to please, he behaved excellently, and the roughness and curtness once shorn from his manner, he proved a delightful companion. Some of the gentle breeding of early years took form again, and the obvious strength of the man, as marked in his cheery egotism as in his mighty shoulders, did something towards modifying Marion Stewart's first opinions. She watched him covertly, noting his manner, his carriage, his firm light footstep, rendered sure and agile by two years of cramped surroundings, of moving on rolling decks, and the more she saw the more she approved of him. To see him swing back a chair with one easy motion of arm and body and seat himself in the requisite pose for conversation, without shufflings of feet or uneasy

fidgeting into position, was a pleasure to her eye, and she found herself mentally stringing words, writer fashion, to describe the light, quick strength of his muscular frame.

He spoke well, too, and this, being a matter within her own province, met with due appreciation. For all that his early education had been relegated to oblivion, the greatest benefit the classics have to bestow still remained to him—the clear, free use of an untrammelled vocabulary. To have the root-stocks of modern tongues well grounded at childhood and in youth is to lay the foundation-stone of the fabric of language well and truly. That he had upon it acquired the broad strength of the rough-hewn Northland speech was a benefit for which, being ignorant of its value, he gave no thanks to Providence. And yet, to the girl, striving at an apprenticeship in her native tongue, his swift answers, his ready repartee, and the forceful strength of words in which he clothed strongly held opinions, came as lesson on lesson. She began to put cases to him, to demand explanations of the scheme of things as it appeared to her, less with the desire of gaining his opinion for its own value, than for the sheer pleasure of hearing the decisive and powerful construction of the sentences in which he expressed it.

A woman with any other training would have admired the man himself as seen looming behind the compelling words; but Marion Stewart, prepossessed by an idea of his weakness of character, always explained away any feeling he might excite in her by the same formula.

"He's a speaker," she decided, with a sage nod of her little head. "Just a speaker. That's all. If only I had the man's words to use,—and they're of no use to him, not a bit, —I could do something with them. A good education, and the need since to speak and give orders clearly and distinctly without waste of words or time. What a training! I shall have to wait twenty years before I shall have the right word instinctively at command as he has. That's a man's education. Why can't we all be trained alike?"

She dimly resented Laurence's gift of tongues; but her analysis left one important point out of the question. Her words, written never so carefully, could never be more than so many black and white symbols, while Laurence's tongue was backed by his eyes and hands, and—though of this she stood self-blinded—by a strong individuality. Even had she been told this very thing by the most admired of her fellow-craftsmen, she would have rejected the idea with scorn, so sure was

she, in her singleness of mind, that the man's words and not his personality were the influencing factors in her thoughts.

As for Laurence, he walked precariously, although, fortunately for himself, he had no fear of disillusioning his lady's eyes. The ice once broken, he progressed rapidly in her favor, and, conscious that unrestrained speech and action could hurt him but little in her opinion since that evil beginning of acquaintance, spoke almost as freely to her as he would have done to another man. Once or twice, indeed, he slipped into such a careless oath as men commonly use in nearer intercourse, receiving no further reprimand than an uplifted finger and a disapproving shake of her head. Fearing to put restrictions on his speech, she made no further objection; but Laurence, appreciating her leniency, swore no more, though his criticisms and comments in ordinary conversation lost nothing of their freedom and caustic point.

On Thursday he went to call on Dwyer according to appointment. To his delight, his friend was able to report some progress.

"There were six guinea-pigs, and I think I've got 'em all," he said. "All that are alive and at large, that is. Dewhurst blew his brains out last year—best thing he ever did in his life, I should say. I've written to his

executors, and that'll be all right, for certain. Poultney, chairman of directors—Sir Thomas George Evelyn Poultney, of Middlemarsh Hall, Berks—has changed his address. Virginia Water's his country house now—though why they wanted to lock up that poor water-headed softly, Lord knows. I've written to his man of business as well. Mortimer & Reingold held a share apiece, the pretty dears, and the other two were a shirt merchant in the city and his head clerk. Well-sounding suburban addresses they had, and they'd done business with your father before. How the deuce any man could have been fooled with such a palpable fraud, I'm dashed if I know."

"Never mind about the fraud," Laurence interrupted. "Have you got the shares?"

"All except Poultney's and Dewhurst's, and there won't be any bother with them. I didn't dare go to M. & R. for the purpose, so I met 'em accidentally—I know where they're to be found at midday—and had a drink with 'em. While we were chatting I mentioned that I'd seen you a few days before, and that you were in fair raiment, beautiful to behold, and fatted and sleek. I also mentioned that you'd been breaking hearts, and mentioned the fair Constance. D'you mind?"

"I don't see why you need have dragged that in," Laurence grumbled. "Go on."

"Don't you? Well, I do. Your being back here amounts to nothing, but if you've been hanging around that description of shop window, it's possible you've money to spend. Anyhow, that sheeny, Reingold, pricked up his ears.

" 'Where'd he get the brath?' he asked.

" 'How should I know?' I said. 'No affair of mine.'

"Then they talked about you for a bit, and Reingold said he supposed you'd done pretty well out of the estate. 'Artful young cove,' he said you were. 'Fancy his selling hith yacht, an' all. Thpeculation couldn't account for all those thousands, my dear. I tell you, Herman Averil wathn't a gambler, really thpeakin'.' "

"Didn't you kick him?" Laurence asked savagely.

"Kick him? Not much. What for, my grossly libeled angel? Nothing about kicking in my instructions. I drank up and made out I was going to quit, and they asked me to have another. I wouldn't, I said, and then as an afterthought I suggested tossing for the three drinks. 'Let's make a little gamble of it,' I said. 'I've got a share in that company of old Averil's—the Iceland Develop-

ment Company, that showed up so at the inquiry. You two have a share each. Let's toss for drinks, the loser to take all three

shares and see what he can get for 'em from young Averil. The pup may be ready to pay a quid apiece for 'em rather than have us rubbing 'em on his nose.'

"They agreed, and I'm hanged if Mortimer didn't win the shares. He growled at it—

said he didn't know you personally, and so what chance had he of pulling your leg? I laughed, and offered to toss him again, half a quid or nothing for the three shares—and here they are."

He showed the scrip to Laurence, laughing.

"Good man you are, Pat."

"Oh, that's all right! It's a pleasure to do that pack. I enjoyed it, man."

"And how about the debentures, and were there any other ordinaries, and if so, who's got them?" Laurence demanded.

"There were a hundred debentures at a hundred pounds each, and they were all taken up by that old fool down in Somerset. He paid ninety-five quid apiece for 'em—six per cent. debentures. The thing screams aloud, don't it?"

"Finance isn't taught at sea—much. Go on."

"*Experto crede,* eh? I told you I judged you'd been seafaring, at the very first.

"Well, in addition to this ten thousand quids' worth of bee-you-tiful paper, he weighed out for eight hundred of the ordinary stock, and that's all that was ever issued."

"Who's got 'em?"

"His daughter. She's a lone, lorn spinster, and if—mark you, I say if—there's anything

in this deal, and you make money by it, I think you're a worthy son of a worthy father —that's all."

Laurence thought of Marion, and the crowded, hungry town so full of danger, and hardened his heart.

"She's not the only single woman in the world. I want those shares, Pat, and I must have 'em. If you're going to get conscience-stricken at dealing with a woman——"

"Pooh, man, that's nothing to do with it. I'm acting as your agent. It's for you to say what's to be done."

"Can you get 'em, do you think?"

"Yes, I think so. The lady is alone, without advisers, and I shouldn't think there ought to be any difficulty. Harper's evidence as to the value of the land was pretty conclusive, and I should think she ought to be glad to see a hundred quid down in place of paper that anyone can tell her is valueless. She's called——"

"Don't tell me," Laurence interrupted quickly. "I don't want to know who she is. It's one thing to rob an abstract nonentity, but another to do a woman down when you know her name or anything about her. I'll tell you what I'll do. I've got a billet waiting for me, and I ought to be able to save a hun-

dred by the end of the year. I live small, you know."

"I don't know anything of the sort. On the contrary——"

"Oh, shut up, do. I'll reckon on saving that hundred. You can offer her a hundred down, and a hundred in twelve months' time. I'll undertake that much—and that's all I jolly well will do. Will that be enough?"

"It'll be enough to buy the shares, for certain," Dwyer said. "I really think a hundred would do that. If you desire to salve your conscience you can offer the extra sum."

"Well, I'll do it, then. Conscience be sugared!—I haven't got one. But since it's a woman I'll do that much for her."

"Very well. Call again on Monday, and if I've got the shares you shall have 'em then. Oh, by the way, one thing. The day after I got those shares from Mortimer & Reingold that sheeny came here.

" 'Look here,' he said. 'A joke'th a joke, Dwyer, my boy. About those shares of Averil's we tossed for yethterday—I understood you to thay you were a holder.'

"I told him I was, and he wanted to know how that could be? Artful devils they are. Would you believe it, he'd gone and had a look at the list of shareholders—after carrying the thing out as a joke like that."

"They must have suspected something from your manner," Laurence suggested, a sinking at his heart.

"Not they—I don't think so, anyhow. It's just their infernal methodical way of doing things.

"Well, he asked how I was a shareholder, and like a fool—I ought to have grinned at the idea of diddling 'em out of a couple of shares, as if it were of no importance—like a fool I pulled open my drawer and showed him the shares I'd got from Hayley and his clerk. 'I bought them yesterday,' I told him. Blame fool! I could have kicked myself the moment I'd spoken."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing to speak of. He just glanced at them: 'Ah! four shares,' he said. 'Well, if you get 'em all for nothing you'll be able to treat yourthelf to a dinner out of young Averil,' and then he cleared out."

"Can he find out who's got the other shares?" Laurence asked anxiously.

"Course he can. We're a bit ahead of the game, because we've got the address of the present holder, and it'll take him a day or two to get that, however much he hurries. But I shouldn't bother, if I were you. I don't expect he'll think any more of it, and if he does, he's first got to get the address, as I say; and

after that he won't offer twenty pounds for the shares. Trust a Jew, my boy. We shall have bagged the lot by the time he's made a move."

"Let's hope so," Laurence said, with some forebodings. "Is that all?"

"Yes. And now, are you going to stand me a lunch, or am I going to stand you one? Toss for it, eh? Right. Where have you been keeping yourself this last week? I'm bored and Connie's disconsolate. She was here after your address last Monday—and young Farrant puts on more side than ever. If I were as big as you, Laurie, and any geological whelp cut me out, I'd kick him, hard. Why this sudden retirement from a life of pleasure?"

"A life of footle. I'm fed with it, man. I've had my fling, and it's but a weary business at best. I shan't be in town longer than another month, Pat, and then I'm going back to work, like a good boy."

"Well, that's good hearing. I tell you, when first you arrived in town a month ago, I felt nervous. Y'see, you were always such a whole-hog sort of cove, and you gave me to understand that you were rolling in wealth. And certainly you managed to put in a month of spree that would have killed a horse if it had lasted a year. What's the meaning of

this sudden pull up? And when are you going to disclose your 'orrible past?"

"I'll tell you now," Laurence said, desirous of turning aside inquiries as to his present manner of living. "I'll tell you all about it, Pat, and you can see for yourself whether I was driven hard or no." And over the luncheon table, omitting only all mention of his landing in Iceland, he gave Dwyer the history of the past two years.

CHAPTER XVI

Although Miss Constance Armitage's character presented many traits not generally esteemed as virtues, she possessed at least one, the value of which is rarely denied—she was a business woman. Some few years of a precarious existence, spent for the greater part in touring companies of the "No. 2" grade, had destroyed any of the small trust she had ever been inclined to put in mankind, and although an occasional advertisement in the *Era* described her as "resting" at the present time, it may safely be averred that the description was inaccurate. Indeed, before her meeting with Laurence she was pressed for money harshly, and her exertions towards amassing it were as little restful as they well could be. In this predicament his advent on her horizon had seemed like providence, and an almost genuine warmth at heart testified not only to the value of his gifts, but also to the straits to which she had been reduced before she had met him.

Added to this, purely business woman though she esteemed herself to be, was another feeling. Thoroughly and heartily weary

of the types of men most commonly met by the women of her class, Laurence came to her with the freshness of salt sea breezes. His strength and quickness, even his coarseness and brutality, were a change from the sickly sweetened compliments and cheap adulation paid to her hitherto. Moreover—most endearing of characteristics—he spent money royally, and their last drive to Richmond, followed by the supper at his rooms, had been invested with a new and novel interest for her—the extraordinary feeling of really liking a man for his own sake, and not as a matter of convenience. She had kissed him at parting with some approach to real emotion; and as she stood outside the door of her motor-car—jobbed by the kindness of Mr. Mortimer, stockbroker, of the firm of Mortimer & Reingold—she looked at his tall figure upon the pavement with the first feeling of admiration for a man she had felt since she was seventeen. And, alas! she was nine-and-twenty now, although she successfully denied it.

She spoke of the feelings of her maiden heart to a bosom friend next morning. The friend, who was shopping, had called in to borrow three shillings with which to buy gloves. "My tick's stopped at Stagg & Mantle's," she said in extenuation, and narrated a little piece of personal history that

would have been the most commonplace of domestic squabbles had she but been married to the gentleman with whom she had disagreed. As she was not, the tale possessed an interest all its own.

"Men are beasts, anyway," she concluded.

"M-m," murmured Miss Armitage. She was standing before a mirror, her mouth full of hairpins and her fingers busy at a stray tress behind her ears. She pushed in the last pin with exact accuracy, regarding the effect sideways in the glass, then with a swishing of disarranged petticoats produced a small puff from the neighborhood of her knee and dabbed at her nose meditatively.

"M-m," she said again, replacing the puff. "Yes I suppose they are—of course they are. But it's our fault. We're such fools."

"What on earth makes you take that tone?" her friend asked indignantly. "Fools! You speak for yourself, Connie, my dear. If you like to call yourself a fool you're welcome, I'm sure."

"I believe I am half a fool, and that's a fact. I—— Do you think you could get silly about a man, Lucy?"

"I? The idea! And you—of all girls in the world. Who is it? Do tell me. I'm just dying——"

"You know him. He was here at tea last week when you came in."

"What—young Avery, or whatever his name is? The one you called Lucifer? The man with big ugly hands and a bad temper? Is that the one?"

Constance Armitage walked to the window and looked out upon the quiet street.

"Y-yes," she said. "What do you think of him?"

"Oh, I don't know. Bit of a brute, I should think. But he's rich, isn't he?"

"I suppose so"—wearily. "I—I don't care if he isn't. He's a man. Yes, and he's a bit of a brute too—that's what I like him for."

" 'Twouldn't do for all of us to think alike," the friend sagely remarked. "Personally, I should prefer young Farrant. He's quite the gentleman—and the other isn't. But, fool as you call yourself, I notice you choose the richer man to get silly about. You'll steer clear of Hanwell if you don't get worse symptoms than that, my dear." She wandered down the stairs and took her three shillings to Leicester Square, leaving Miss Armitage to indulge in day-dreams.

Her newly discovered predilection for Laurence was not a sufficiently strong impulse to make her manner anything but pleasant to

Farrant, who preceded him that afternoon, as has already been told. Laurence's rudeness alarmed her but little. She had often enough before now been subjected to insults beside which mere discourtesy paled; and she never conceived it possible that Laurence, who had sought her acquaintance, could be wearying of her just at the moment when her own thoughts began steadily to turn towards him. She wondered when he failed to arrive at dinner, but her manner to her companion lacked nothing of charm on that account. Only, on her return home, "He's jealous of that fool boy," she reflected. "I oughtn't to have shown him that pendant. I'll write and ask him to call again to-morrow, or maybe he'll sulk for a week." The note spoke only of a future meeting; but in its carefully chosen words were gentle hope, a foreshadowed meekness and sorrow in the event of that meeting not taking place, and a vague regret at the untoward occurrences of the afternoon before. In a word, it was a little *chef d'œuvre* of its kind, and it is to be regretted that Laurence burned it unanswered on the morning of its arrival.

All through that day she waited, and through the next. The last three Sundays had seen him at her tea-table, and she made sure that he must call on this, only to be

again disappointed. Though bitter experience had before now taught her how little value attaches to easily plucked fruit, on Monday she took the, for her, unusual course of calling upon him at New Cavendish Street, only to find him gone and the key of his rooms in the hall porter's hands. It says much for her self-possession that she was able to make perfectly coherent inquiries about her missing shoe; and the porter's wife being called, it was handed to her, with an audible accompaniment of virtuous sniffs.

"Them smutty marks was on it when I found it," that lady informed her. "Mr. Averil, 'e'd throwed it be'ind the fireplace," she was glad to be able to add.

"So he tells me," Miss Armitage replied, in her sweetest manner. Her use of the present tense adroitly turned the tables on the matron by implying that Laurence had left the rooms for the purpose of enjoying more of her society.

The porter's wife sniffed again and retired, and Constance drove to Chancery Lane to ask Dwyer for Laurence's present address.

"I don't know it, my dear girl," he said. "I swear I don't—really and truly. I had dinner with him last Thursday, and since then I haven't set eyes on him. I've got an appointment with him on Thursday next, and

I'll tell him you want to see him then, if you like."

"Oh no—no. Don't trouble. I don't really want to see him, only—only——" She stopped. Only now did she begin to understand that she really did want to see him very much indeed. But, "It's of no importance," she assured Dwyer, and drove back to her flat in a frame of mind bordering on jealous tears. She guessed he had gone to Paris. He had spoken of going—had even offered, in a careless moment, to take her with him. With the thought of Harry Mortimer before her eyes, she had refused. Judicious lying would square this business with him, but a trip to Paris meant a definite break and probably an unpleasant row; and although Mortimer was fat, and oily in pleasantry, she still could hardly afford that until she was more sure of Laurence. As has been remarked, she was pre-eminently a business woman. And now Laurence had gone alone, just as she discovered she liked him well enough to go anywhere with him—to Kamtschatka, if need be—always assuming she could go by *train de luxe*, of course. It was intensely annoying, and picturing him behaving in Paris as he had in London, she really did cry a little when she went to bed that night.

When next morning brought a wire from

Mortimer announcing his intention of calling on her that afternoon, she did not cry—she swore. None the less she did her hair carefully, put on a new blouse, and went through her desk with vigilance. Mortimer had a nasty knack of demanding keys—which could not well be refused—and routing out drawers with a wary eye for unpaid bills. It showed the vilest taste, she had many times assured him; but bluff Harry, who had been a butcher in a small way before a lucky bet had placed the capital for his first stock and share transaction in his hands, was moved by her opinion no whit. His habit of announcing his intended visits by wire Constance regarded as a special interposition of Fate on her behalf.

"I hear that young whelp Averil's been hanging about after you," he remarked genially over the teacups. The warmth of the day had induced him to remove his coat, and his tight waistcoat showed his overfed figure to advantage. Constance, reclining in a long chair with her back to the window, looked at him with a new feeling that was not at all admiration.

"Why 'whelp'?" she asked languidly.

"'Cause he is—'cause I say he is."

"Do you know him?"

"No—nor don't want to. I knew his father—stuck-up hypocrite!—and that's all I

want to know of that lot. He shot himself. You've heard of the big Averil smash two years ago, ain't you?"

"Yes, of course. Who told you I knew him?"

"Young Dwyer—yesterday. Reingold and me was having a drink, and he joined us."

"How did he come to mention Lau—young Averil?"

"Lau—what?"

"Laurence, he's called."

"An' you've got to christened names, 'ave you?" He grinned angrily. "You better take care, my dear. Of course I know you can't help havin' these boys hangin' about you—lookin' out for an engagement as you are. But if you make me jealous, you're steerin' for trouble, I needn't tell you."

"My dear Harry! Don't be silly now,——"

Her protestations having soothed him, she returned warily to the subject.

"But you didn't tell me how Dwyer came to be speaking of me," she said.

"He said he'd seen this young whelp in town, an' that he was hangin' about after you; an' as your acquaintance had a way of comin' expensive, he supposed Averil had money. Then he said he'd toss us for our shares in old man Averil's Iceland Development Company flam, an' try to get the price

of a dinner out of Averil with 'em. Reingold an' me we had a share each. I won 'em first, and then 'e tossed me again an' won 'em back himself. Rum thing, too. He said he had one share before we tossed; so after we got back to the office, Reingold 'e looks out the original prospectus, and there was nothin' about Dwyer bein' on the board—and nobody 'ud ever buy shares in the thing. So Reiny, 'e was passin' Dwyer's office this mornin', an' called in to pull his leg about bein' so hard up as to do us down for a couple of shares that wasn't worth the paper they was printed on. And s'help me, he had a share after all—two shares. He'd got two more of the original shares in his desk, and showed 'em to Reingold."

"Where did he get them from?" Constance asked, with duly simulated interest. The man's talk was going in at one ear and out at the other, but any appearance of boredom was forbidden.

"Some old draper chap in the City. I forget his name. Reingold was fair surprised at it, I tell you. 'What should young Dwyer be gettin' 'old of them shares for?' says he. 'Tossin' us was all right—if 'e really 'ad a share of 'is own lyin' idle. But to go an' buy two, an' then accidentally to meet us an' toss for two more—an' all to try an' get young

Averil to brass up four quid—an' Averil 'is pal, an' all! Besides, there ain't no sense to it. There's dozens of other things old man Averil touched. This pup couldn't square 'em all, not unless 'e was a millionaire; an' what 'e should want meddlin' with this particular company I can't see. Reingold can't make it out neither. But they've come to the wrong shop for once. Reiny's lookin' out the holders of other shares—I reckon we can buy a good whack of 'em for next to nothin'—and if Mr. Bloomin' Pat Dwyer and his pal Averil think they can do M. & R., they've come to the wrong shop."

Emerging from a reverie, which Laurence, Farrant, and the urgent necessity for a new evening cloak shared between them, the last few words caught and arrested Miss Armitage's ear. No observer could have detected that her expression meant aught but admiration for Mr. Mortimer's business acumen.

"I'm sure of that," she said agreeably.

Mortimer swelled pompously, much to her concealed distaste.

"And what are these shares he was trying to sell?"

"Sell! There's a woman all over. He wasn't selling. He tossed us for 'em—an', as I tell you, Reiny's found out 'e's been buyin' elsewhere. Looks queer, don't it?"

"Very," she said, in total ignorance of what he was talking about. "And what is he buying them for?"

"Who knows? He says he wants 'em to pull young Averil's leg with—make him pay full value for 'em rather than 'ave it dragged up in conversation that 'is father was a swindler."

"I don't think——" said Constance Armitage, and then relapsed into silence. She did not think anything about it. She was positive that no power on earth could get money—or anything else—out of Laurence Averil without his own good will. And that Pat Dwyer should be trying to blackmail him! The thing was impossible.

By questioning, she got the whole story out of Mortimer again, and so judiciously did she frame her inquiries that she managed to convey the impression that his own power as a *raconteur* was her sole reason for asking for a second rendering of the tale. He bloated as he repeated it in what he considered a breezy, man-o'-the-world style, and poor Constance—whose name, contrary to all traditional precedent, really was Armitage, and whose dim girlhood had been spent among kindly folk of the middle class—writhed inwardly. She controlled herself successfully, however, and by her merry laughter and naïve comments man-

aged not only to get all the information she needed, but also, before Mortimer departed, a promise of the desired evening cloak. So that, when the door had closed behind him, her action in stamping her foot and throwing a book violently across her room was entirely unjustified.

Her feelings relieved by this timely outburst, she sat down in the same chair, her elbows on her knees and her pretty chin in her hands, and thought her very best. What bearing could this have upon Laurence's absence?—for that the circumstances were in some way linked together she felt certain. Dwyer buying shares in a worthless company to threaten Laurence with! She knew both the men too well to conceive that possible for a moment. Perhaps he was buying them as a mere speculation on his own initiative? And yet, Laurence was away somewhere. True, Dwyer had sworn he didn't know his address, and he seemed to be telling the truth. But Laurence away—Laurence's father's connection with the company when it was floated—she felt sure he must have something to do with the business. Her tangled thoughts, brought to a knot that refused to unravel, slid back to their last meeting—and she sat upright and brought her hand down on her knee with a slap of decision.

What was it he had got so excited about when he was talking to Farrant? Some silly piece of stone that he had nearly smashed her china with. She remembered his keen attention to Farrant's lengthy geological explanations, and the way in which he had rushed off down her stairs. That was it! That was it, for certain!

Within ten minutes a telegraph operator in the nearest post-office was tap-tapping a message to Farrant that ran: "Bored to death come and take me out to dinner C. A."

Farrant was delighted. This was promotion indeed. He kissed her hand prettily on his arrival, and murmured compliments on her appearance which were wholly sincere, for excitement had put more brightness than usual into her eyes and an unwonted color on her cheeks. She smiled graciously, and thanked him for his kindness in coming.

"I was getting lonely and depressed," she said. "Being out of an engagement so long, you know. But I won't bother you with that, Fra—Mr. Farrant. And now, we won't go to a big place this evening. You shall take me to some dear little quiet restaurant, where we can chat in peace, and you can talk to me and cheer me up."

Farrant glanced at himself in the mirror, squaring his narrow shoulders and straight-

ening his tie. As Constance had intended, her little slip into his Christian name had sent him into the seventh heaven; and when she remembered hulking, sulky Laurence, she could have laughed in the little dandy's smirking face. However, dandy or no, he served her turn, and he was at all events a gentlemanly little fellow, a point that counts with every woman when any man but the one man of her choice is in question. From him oaths are pet sayings and kicks caresses. From other men courtesy goes far.

They went to a little Italian restaurant in Oxford Street, and, once ensconced in a quiet corner, Constance soon was able to turn the conversation towards Averil, half hinting that his brusque brutality of late had incurred her displeasure.

Farrant, delighted and encouraged by her acquiescence, launched out into a diatribe on Laurence's vile manners and—as he put it—the rough clumsiness of his personal appearance.

"He could pull you in pieces with his hands," Constance meditated, as she gazed at him critically from under her drooping eyelids; but all she said was, "Oh, I think you're hard on him, Mr. Farrant. Of course he hasn't had your advantages. Living in town, don't you know—and travel." Farrant, hav-

ing once visited Liège for the purpose of inspecting the Belgian coal fields, naturally preened himself. "I used to like him," she went on. "He seemed to me genuine—sincere, you know. But of late, really, he seems so rough. You noticed his manner the other afternoon?"

"A perfect boor," Farrant declared. "Personally I should describe him as of a low type—animal, you know." Laurence's square, strongly set head was far more intellectual than his own, but perhaps Farrant had in view his deep chest and long arms, which certainly in no way approached the ethereal.

"He's very strange sometimes," Constance assented with a faint tinge of sadness in her tone, suggestive of a rebuke wrung from a deeply charitable nature. "What was that nonsense he was talking the other day—about that bit of stone of his being worth more than turquoise?—more than that dear pretty turquoise you gave me? See?" She held it up from the laces in which it had been hiding, and flashed a look at him that made the youth's head spin with gratification.

"D'ye like it? I'm so glad I've been so fortunate—— What was it he was saying, did you ask? There! There's an instance of the man's intelligence. One would think anyone with any education at all would have

known better than to call malachite a precious stone. And he compared it with turquoise! Of course, what I gave you was only matrix turquoise," he added modestly.

"It's perfectly sweet, whatever you call it. I like these pretty streaks in it."

"Exactly. That's the matrix. But malachite!—it's quite common stuff relatively. One would be inclined to call it merely an expensive marble, almost. But why do you ask?"

"He—he offered to have that little piece cut for me," Constance lied promptly. "He seemed to value it himself."

"Polished, you mean, not cut. The man's merely a cheap humbug, my dear lady—if you will allow me to speak so of a friend of yours." She shook her head slowly as one reluctant to acknowledge an unpleasant truth. "Why, the stuff's cheap and rubbishy. People use it quite commonly for inlaying with marble for such things as clock cases, and as jewelry it shows atrocious taste. I told him so at your rooms. 'It's only fit for Brummagem jewelry,' I said. 'Quite Brummagem!' He went after that, if you remember." A superior smile testified to the pleasant memory of Laurence vanquished and retiring.

Constance remembered perfectly well, and

said so. The light from her fine eyes was such as that with which a Queen of Beauty might have rewarded a valiant knight of olden time, but behind the admiring glance was vivid curiosity. Her conversation flowed smoothly, but question after question rose in her busy brain. Why had Laurence bolted as he did? What had he learned from this little fool of a man that he should fly downstairs three steps at a time? Why had he gone away?—and where? Why was Pat Dwyer buying worthless shares? What was the name of the company? The Iceland something or other, she remembered.

"And where does malachite come from?" she asked, when next the conversation gave her an opening.

"Russia, I believe—and, I think, Australia."

"Is there any in Iceland?" she asked innocently.

"Hm—ha—I—ah—I really don't know. There's sulphur there, of course, as you know." She didn't know, but nodded as intelligently as if she did. "If there's any copper there—I'm ashamed to say I know little of the Iceland deposits beyond the fact that they're mainly volcanic—but if there's copper there, there's very probably malachite as well. But I don't know."

Perhaps Laurence had gone to Iceland, she reflected. In that case Dwyer's statement that he was ignorant of his address might be true—at least it wasn't a deliberate lie if he was at sea. And despite Pat's manner, a lie she had half believed it to be.

"How far away is Iceland?" she asked.

"I really don't know the number of miles. It's about a week's journey to get there. I knew some fellows once who went there salmon fishing."

A week to get there, and a week back. That disposed of her last theory. She had seen Laurence the Thursday before, and next Thursday he had an appointment with Dwyer. Oh, bother it all! she couldn't think with this little idiot talking, talking, talking—and expecting to be answered all the time. So she shelved the whole matter for reference in some remote recess of her brain, and devoted herself to being as pleasant as possible to the man before her.

She bade him farewell at the foot of her stairs, thanking him profusely for his kindness. "Such a pleasant evening," she declared. "I feel quite another woman. I was so depressed before you came. Good-by, dear Mr. Farrant—well, Frank, then. Come and see me next Monday." Her hand lingered in his long enough to send the youth

home in a mood of jaunty confidence in the invincibility of his manly charms.

To induce sleep she drank a glass of weak whisky and water and smoked a cigarette before going to bed; but all through her dreams Laurence bore great masses of malachite on his shoulders to build a mighty green palace, and when it was finished he knelt at her feet with a sneering laugh on his face and told her it was for her. Whereupon she lifted him by the hand and led him towards it; but just as they reached the door it vanished into thin air, and all that was left was her friend Lucy, who was crying and saying, "Men are beasts, Con. I really did want a bit of that stuff to wear in an earring."

CHAPTER XVII

On the following Friday Laurence walked to the station with Marion Stewart, and then, presuming on three days of irreproachable behavior, petitioned to be allowed to lunch with her again. "I've business in the City," he said. "At least——"

Her finger went up warningly, but she laughed cheerfully nevertheless.

"The truth," she said. "Please."

"At least—I really do want to have lunch with you," he declared. "You called it a business transaction last week yourself."

"It's a stretching of the bond," she said slowly. "Are you sure you quite understand how I feel?"

"Positive. You think I'm improving rapidly," Laurence said impudently. "I behave as prettily as—as a tailor's dummy. And you picture me in future going back to steady work and writing you once a week, thanking you for putting me on the right path, and giving you interesting sketchy letters about a northern fishing port. Isn't that so?"

It was so exact a description of her own

thoughts that she flushed in spite of her laughter.

"You—you really are queer," she said. "Yes. You may come with me to lunch today, if only as a reward for your cuteness. D'you know—I—I don't believe you're half as big a silly as you look."

Laurence shouted like a schoolboy, but soon fell silent. His time was coming—the time when the brown eyes behind their long lashes should look into his own with something better than curiosity or laughter in them. Nearly a week now of fairly constant intercourse to his credit, he reflected, and, so far, no shadow across the joyous days of sunlight.

His conversation and the new consciousness that he was a trusted friend broke up the defensive reserve in which the lonely Englishwoman must perforce travel, and for once her bi-weekly ride to town became a blithe holiday jaunt. They got out at Charing Cross, and he was allowed to accompany her along the busy Strand as far as Fleet Street. They dawdled, making a long half-hour of the promenade by looking into shop windows and watching the traffic, and Laurence tentatively suggested a theater for the evening; but finding her demur a little, postponed the visit for another more favorable occasion. Promising to meet him at Rupert Street at one, she

nodded an adieu and went about her business.

Laurence called upon Dwyer, but on being informed he was out, retraced his steps. At the corner of Bedford Street he decided to have a drink, and went to the Bodega for that purpose. The place, as usual, was blue with tobacco smoke and crowded with the stranded flotsam and jetsam of the boards, and he took his glass with a copy of the *Telegraph* to a corner for quietness. He glanced over the news, but the first moment his eyes rose above the top of the paper they fell on Constance Armitage. She was talking listlessly to a gorgeous member of the provincial manager tribe, but had evidently seen him before he saw her, for their eyes met and she came over to him, her hand extended.

"My dear Lucifer," she greeted him. "Fancy finding you here, of all places in the world!"

Laurence stammered something about having come in for a quiet drink, and she drew a chair towards his table and sat down.

"So you've returned from your journey?" she smiled.

"Haven't been on any journey," Laurence averred.

"No? Then where on earth have you been keeping yourself?"

"I haven't been out of London."

"Then I think you're very horrid not to have come to see me all this long week. Do you know, I actually went to call on you last Monday."

"Yes? I—I've left New Cavendish Street," Laurence said lamely.

"So I found. Where are you staying?"

"In the suburbs."

"Oh! Of course, if you don't want me to know where——" She paused. Laurence preserved a stony silence.

"You're a very mysterious person of late,"

she ventured, as a re-opening. "Fancy not letting Mr. Dwyer know your address, even."

"You called there, didn't you?"

"Yes. Have you seen him? He told me you had an appointment with him yesterday. Has he succeeded in buying all those shares you want?"

"What shares?" demanded Laurence, aghast.

"Why, the Iceland—Development—something—aren't they called?" She trickled out her little knowledge in a series of hesitating pauses, and seeing the lively anxiety in his eyes, flashed a knowing smile at him and drove the bolt home. "You know, where the malachite comes from."

Laurence slowly and methodically folded his copy of the *Telegraph* in four, folded it again and yet again, until it was a concise billet and he could fold it no longer. Then he pressed it flat upon the little table and looked up.

"What on earth are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Malachite—isn't it some coppery sulphur stuff? You know. That little stone you showed Mr. Farrant and myself. And the shares Pat Dwyer got from Messrs. Somebody & Reingold and bought from that old

draper in the City. I forget his name," she added naïvely.

"When did you see Dwyer last?"

"Yesterday."

"What time?"

"Really, how you cross-question anybody!" She drew a bow at a venture. "About this time yesterday morning, I should think." For once she missed the mark. Laurence had been at Dwyer's office himself half an hour later, and Pat had mentioned her only as calling the Monday before, so he began to feel himself on safer ground.

She mistook his silence for consternation and reached out a gloved hand to pat him on the wrist. "You're like all big, strong, masterful men, Lucifer," she said. "You think we women are such silly, thoughtless things that you can do anything with us—and you can, too—your type, I know." Her look frankly showed he had found favor in her eyes, and he fidgeted uncomfortably. "But we're not altogether fools, for all that. We keep our eyes open, and even think sometimes. Now, see. You didn't know what that stuff was till you came to my rooms, did you?—When young Farrant told you, I mean. You said you valued it more than turquoises—but that was because it had a sentimental value, wasn't it? Then he told you it had a market

value as well, and you went off in a big hurry to find out what it was worth, or perhaps to buy some from somebody who didn't know. A shareholder in the Iceland Company, eh? And—and you've never been near me since," she concluded reproachfully.

While she trusted to her infallible woman's instinct she hulled him through and through at every shot; but the moment she started guessing he knew it, and her relapse into sentiment gave him breathing space. He made no answer, only pushing his hands deeply into his pockets and regarding her under lowering brows.

Again she stretched out a hand towards him, and there was something wistful in her glance and the relaxing corners of her mouth.

"Aren't you ever coming to see me any more?" she asked.

After all, she was a woman, he reflected, and his new love for another of her sex made his manner gentler than his wont.

"No, little lady," he said, kindly enough. "Not any more. I'll send you something in place of the pair of shoes I spoiled last week, and then we won't see any more of each other."

He could not know that words and manner alike were cruelly familiar to her, and her flash into quick anger startled him.

"Curse the shoes!" she said shamelessly. "Do you think I care for the —— shoes? You could have had the shoes and the woman who stood in them for the bare asking, if you liked. Cowardly beasts you men are. You play with me for a month, and just when I care more about you than anything else in the world, off you go—with another woman, as likely as not." She read the truth in his eyes. "It *is* another woman, then! But I'll be even with you. I know more than you think about that Iceland business, and I'll spoil your game. You shan't make money out of that to spend on another woman." In a towering rage she struck the table with her clenched hand and rose to her feet. "I hate you!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how I hate you—you devil!" and before Laurence could make any answer she was gone, leaving him whistling softly through his teeth in half-angry, half-pitying preoccupation.

"Tss—tss," he said to himself. "Poor little beast of a woman. I wonder how much she knows. This means trouble. I must hurry Pat up."

Constance, in a whirl of tempestuous fury, was half-way to Mortimer's office before she remembered that visits there were forbidden. Recalling the prohibition, she sought the nearest post-office and sent him an express

letter. "News," she wrote. "Averil's Iceland Co. Come and see me at once.—C." Driving straight home, she raged and relented, and raged again until Mortimer arrived, hot and hurried, a couple of hours later.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"What have you done about that Iceland company?" she returned.

"Found out the fool the sham was aimed at. But he's dead nearly two years ago. He died after the inquiry."

"Who's got the shares now?"

"His daughter. But we shall have 'em in a week."

"Don't you be too sure of that. What are they worth?"

"Lord knows. There's ten thousand in debentures and a few hundreds ordinary stock. We're going to offer her forty quid for the lot. That ought to buy 'em."

"Forty pounds won't. Oh, you fools!—you fools! Don't you see what the game is?"

"No, I'm dashed if I do," said Mortimer. "What's up, Connie? What bee have you got in your bonnet now?"

"Bee! Good heavens above! Half a minute. What do I get out of this?"

"What do you get? Ain't you a bit ahead of the game? We don't know there's anything in it yet."

"I do. I know just what's in it, too, for a bet. Look here. If my information's right, do I get half profits?"

"Not by a jugful, you don't. Keep quiet, now. You've shown me you think there's something in it, and I shall buy, anyway, now. If I'm had—well, you'll hear of it, that's all. If you like to tell me all you know, I'll give you ten per cent. on what we make out of it if you put us on to a cert. That's a hundred quid out of every thousand we clear—and thundering good commission, too. You aren't putting any money in it, and you run no risk."

"Make it two hundred in every thousand."

"Not a penny more than I've said. Now then, out with it—and hurry up, for I'm busy."

Constance hesitated—and then yielded.

"Very well, then. Here you are. There's malachite in that ground. I don't know how much or where it is, but young Averil knows —I taxed him with it only this morning. . . . Don't be a fool, Harry. I met him in the Bodega, the beast. And Dwyer's buying those shares for him."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Do you take him for a fool? He's a—never mind what he is. I hate him like poison, if you want to know. But he's no fool,

and if he's after those shares they're worth having, and you'd better hurry up if you're going to get your hands on them."

Mortimer was at the door by this time. "Remember, a hundred out of every thousand you make," she reminded him.

He went down over the stairs almost as fast as Laurence had gone on a similar occasion the week before, and before the sound of his flying feet had died away, poor Constance, *fille de joie* and daughter of sorrow, was lying across the table, her head on her arms, in a very torrent of tears.

Meanwhile, Laurence, seated at table and looking into brown eyes, was rapidly recovering from the consternation into which Constance Armitage's threats and apparent knowledge had thrown him. The memory of the lie he had detected her in came as balm to his soul. Had her knowledge been of any real value she would never have made that slip. It was certainly disturbing that she should have known of the tossing-for-shares incident; but, after all, the matter was no secret, and on grimly considering the extent and variety of her acquaintance, there seemed nothing improbable in her hearing the tale told as a joke. As to the malachite—well, she must have been listening to Farrant's

explanations with more attention than he had given her credit for—and the rest was guesswork. At the worst, Pat had the start, and had as good as promised him the shares by Monday. No good worrying, anyhow, he decided, and so set about enjoying the present hour to the utmost.

The lunch went merrily, and with its every minute of time Laurence abased himself in spirit more and more deeply. Oh for the days to come, when divinity should preside at his board always, and this happiness together should be for more than the fleeting hour! He rejoiced in her wit—for witty she was; rejoiced in her beauty—and she was delicately lovely; but most of all rejoiced in that he had never known before in womankind, her brave companionship, whether grave or gay. And to this she came swiftly with him, for his sincerity—perhaps even his first brutality—had shorn the veil of reserve that parts man and maid in their earlier days together. The keen, sharp pleasure of the moment planted memory clear, and through the mists of later years often brought back this hour to him—every turn of her graceful head, every flutter of her hands, the light and pleasant room framing her bright eyes and happy face. Fresh from the sloven atmosphere of the morning's interlude and from the un-

bidden favor and shallow rage of another woman, she seemed to him sexless and dainty as a flower.

As they parted on the pavement outside he put his hand on her shoulder and vainly tried to put his feelings into the heavy harness of words. "This has been a happy hour for me," he said. "I shall never forget this meal. And—and—you won't make the mistake of thinking that I—that I'm the tailor's dummy we spoke of this morning, will you?"

She looked into his eyes for the briefest moment. "N-no," she said. "But, Mr. Avery, please don't go on making sure—of what will only disappoint you in the end."

Her mispronunciation of his name recalled to him, more than anything else could have done, the danger of being premature. He took his hand from her. "No," he said gaily. "I'm not asking for disappointments. I shall see you this evening? Yes? Good-by, then, for the present."

After another visit to Dwyer's office, where in default of seeing his friend, he left a brief note of warning, he sought the river for silent communion with moving waters. A golden evening in Her company—the landlady, a merciful soul and born match-maker after her kind, pleading a headache—followed upon an afternoon during which Laurence trod rolling

clouds, backwards and forwards, along the Embankment; and sitting by her side in the crowded Exhibition grounds, he would have been ready to swear that the painted canvas glories of Earl's Court excelled in matchless beauty the dawns and sunsets of all wild nature at her best.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MESSAGE arrived with Laurence's breakfast on the following morning. "Miss Stewart's compliments," the small hand-maiden repeated, "an' please, sir, will you go out with her this morning? She'll be ready at ten o'clock."

Laurence rushed through his dressing, bestowing loving care, nevertheless, upon his shaving and linen, and was in the entry as the clock struck. She came to him down the stairs hatted and gloved and altogether adorable, a happy light in her eyes and a color on her cheeks he had never seen before. She nodded brightly. "You got my message, then? I want to see you—to ask your advice."

They walked down North End Road towards its squalid end, and turned to the left. Their way led them past the cemetery, and she suggested that they should enter. "It's quiet there," she said, "and I want a long talk with you."

Once inside the gates: "Isn't it strange?" she continued. "Only a week ago you were telling me of your good fortune, and now my

luck's turned too. Five hundred pounds—perhaps more. Look at that first."

She handed him a letter, and the graves and trees and grass spun round and round in a whirling dance of death, and the blue sky and sunlight laughed merrily at his misery.

For the letter was from Dwyer, and contained his own offer for the shares in the Iceland Development Company!

"My God!" he said, and the words were wrung from him in torture. He leaned against a gray box-tomb close by. "My God! And it was you all the time!" Pressing one foot heavily on the ground, he hammered the turf with the heel of the other, his foot swinging rigidly, like the pendulum of some metronome of pain keeping time with his broken sentences.

She beheld him in consternation. The man's pain was so intense that she could see his forehead turn shiny damp in the sunlight, and his white lips show the red marks where he had bitten them to keep from crying out before her face. His utmost being had gone body and soul cheerily to greet the joyous future and hug it to his heart; and, behold! Dwyer's letter had whipped all happiness out of his life as a quick breath strips fairy thistledown from its bare stem.

Wild-eyed and dismayed, he looked up at

her. "Are you ill?" she asked. "Tell me —tell me. What is it?"

He made no answer.

"Won't you say?" she pleaded gently, as though she were speaking to an ailing child. "Shall I fetch a doctor or any help? Oh, what is it? Mr. Avery, tell me!"

"'Avery,' too!" He began to laugh, a little hysterically. "I'll tell you—in a minute. I'm a bit upset, that's all."

They watched each other in silence for a while, he rigid as marble, his fingers biting into the stone ledge behind him and his eyes on hers: she, agitated, fluttering ever so slightly.

Then, "Sit down," he said. "There's a seat. Sit down and wait for me. I'm going to walk to the end of this path—shan't go out of sight. Only I want to think a minute—alone." She seated herself, and without another word he stood erect and started down the central alley of the cemetery, his shoulders held squarely as though bracing against and resisting lashes of a whip.

A dozen steps he had gone, and then quick memory coupled the moment with that other, not two months since, when in just such black despair he had set out on another walk alone, and as he had then turned back to ask the

name of Uthlid rock, so he turned now with another question.

"You said five hundred," he said. "This only offers two."

She held out another letter. He took it from her hand mutely, and set off again, without looking at it or at her.

Half-way down the alley he took it from its envelope and read it. It was from Mortimer & Reingold—offering her five hundred pounds for the shares of the Iceland Development Company in her possession. He read it again, carefully noting every word, folded it and walked on, mad, hopeless desire—hopeless, hopeless—tearing at his heart at every step.

In the chaos of agony that beat and bruised him coherent thought refused to rise. Only the memory of that walk across the Iceland wastes that had brought him here—the tombstones turned to lava blocks before his eyes, the sunlight faded under cold icy blasts, the buildings at the end of the alley took the broken shape and dark color of Uthlid rock, and he strode on in white-hot pain, in a far, far keener agony than that he had known two months before. The smaller details of his torture had not yet come—the heated irons to burn the body on the rack—but he knew that happiness was no more, that laughter was

dead, and that his life henceforward must be gray and cold as the northern wildernesses, hard and useless as the infertile lava that covered them, unsettled as the gale-swept seas. All gone; all hope, all love, all peace —and Marion herself farther than them all. He glanced over his shoulder. She had left the seat he had indicated, and was standing in the pathway, following him with her eyes.

Not until he reached the end of the central alley did any sequence of thought come to him, and then like a flash he saw his duty, clearly as though a shaft of light had flashed down through the darkness engulfing his wild and anguished soul.

For her sake he must strangle his hopes, shatter all dreams of the happy future, and return to pitiless servitude. He must say good-by to her here,—"And a nice, appropriate place to do it in," he said aloud, as he looked around at the gravestones, each with its story of life and love ended and forgotten. A fortnight's active work to do on her behalf—a wire to send at its conclusion—and then, a life dragged out to its end in the old misery—now more utterly hopeless than ever. The wire must come through someone else—Pat Dwyer would do. He could not appear himself. She would think he was doing it to curry favor with her, and would pity

him—and if she did, he would go raging mad and do murder. He must break with her now. No difficulty about that, when she knew who he was and what his father had done for hers. Farewells once over, as brutally as need be, and then away to Leith again—and farther—as fast as rail and boat would carry him. And though his heart was breaking and his life for evermore long pain, all must be done cheerily—cheerily. Emerson's words—long forgotten—came to his tortured mind: "'All must be as gay as the song of a canary—though it be the building of cities'—or the sacrifice of a life's happiness," he quoted bitterly, and returned to her with a firm step and smiling eyes.

"That's queer," he said. "A touch of sun, I expect. Do you know, just as you were speaking, the cemetery fairly spun round. I hardly knew what I was saying.

"Now about these letters. You've asked me for advice, and I'm going to give it to you, and you must abide by it strictly. Do you understand? Abide by it to the letter. You *must*. Say you will."

Marion looked up at him from under level brows. "But this—is this an order?"

"An order—yes. You must obey. I know something of—of Iceland, and these two offers convince me there's—there's something

going on which had better be looked into. You are not to sell yet on any account. I'll go up west to see Mr. Dwyer, of Dwyer & Tyrrell, at once, and you will take him as your adviser in this matter. I—I've got to leave early next week—hadn't a chance to tell you before—only heard from Leith this morning. Dwyer's a good fellow—a sterling good chap. I know him well. We've been friends for years—and if you've any doubts about him you can get references from any reputable firm you please. At present you'll stick fast to the shares, at least for about a fortnight. Then you must abide by Dwyer's instructions. You couldn't be in better hands."

"But he's made me an offer himself."

"Exactly. But he's outbidden, so his offer don't count. You'll find he'll—I'm pretty well sure he'll withdraw it when he hears that. Now, do you understand exactly what you are to do?"

"I am not to sell for a fortnight. I am to call on Mr. Dwyer as a client. And I am to take his advice as to the disposal of the shares." She ticked off each item on a finger. "Is that right?"

"Perfectly right. And now I must go. You've had my advice—that's what I came for, wasn't it?—and now, once more, remem-

ber you *must* do exactly as I've told you. Promise."

Carried away by the energy and authority in his voice, "I promise," she said.

"Then good-by." Out went his hand. "You won't think me rude, leaving you like this, will you? I'm really in an awful hurry, only as you wanted my advice I wouldn't tell you so before. Nice of me, wasn't it? Good-by."

Their hands met—their eyes. "Good-by," she said. "Shall I see you this evening?"

"No. There's something I ought to tell you. You won't want to see me again when you know it. My name isn't Avery; it's Averil—and I am the son of the man who ruined your father." He smiled at her as coolly as though he had just informed her that it was a fine day, then resolutely turned his back on happiness and strode back to Baron's Court Road.

He flung his things into his boxes anyhow, locked them, and was on the station platform within half an hour from the moment he left her. Reaching Chancery Lane before midday, he burst into Dwyer's office *sans ceremonie.*

"Hullo!" Dwyer cried. "Didn't think I was to see you before Monday."

"You're luckier than your deserts, then,

for here I am. I've come to tell you to withdraw my offer for those shares."

"Lord!—what next?" Dwyer exclaimed, with heat. "You're a day behind the fair, my sweet and steady client. I made the offer yesterday, and the acceptance is probably posted by this time."

"No, it isn't. At least—I mean, I don't expect it is. Anyhow, you can wire withdrawing."

"Wire skittles! You're a feeding diet, Laurence Averil. I'll remind you that this is a business office, and I'm a business man, and I don't like these tomfool tricks. If you really mean withdrawing, I'll give you our client's name and address, and you can go and do your dirty work yourself—and I wash my hands of you and your affairs henceforward. You're the middle and two ends of an infernal nuisance, and I'm about sick of you and your vagaries."

"Keep your hair on. I'll give you a bit of news, since you seem inclined to foam at the mouth. You needn't bother to withdraw unless you like. You're outbidden. Mortimer & Reingold have offered five hundred in place of our two."

"Whew! How did you find that out? What the deuce is up? What are you going to do?"

"Never mind how I found it out; it's so—and if you want to know what I'm going to do, I'll tell you, Pat, my dear, if you'll swear great oaths to hold your tongue."

"You're a client, I suppose. Go on."

"I'm going to Iceland to have a look at the ground. There's malachite there. That's what I was after. Miss Stewart—I know her name, you see—will call upon you for advice respecting the sale of her shares in the course of a day or two. Tell her to hang on to 'em like grim death until you hear from me. I'll wire you from Leith in the course of a fortnight or thereabouts, and you'll advise her accordingly. And you will take most particular care that my name does not transpire. Savvy?"

"What are you doing this for?"

"Spite, old dear. I owe M. & R. a trifle for outbidding me."

"If the deal's so good what's the sense of telling her to do anything but hang on?"

"I don't know how much of the stuff there is. See? Here's your chance—that's all you've to look at. A client applies to you for advice. Thanks to an unselfish friend of yours, you're going to be in a position to give advice that is of value, whereby shall you be mag-ni-fi-ed greatly. It's nothing to you if I've an ax to grind, is it?"

"Will the advice be of value?"

"If you follow my definite instructions it will be a very special article indeed. And now just see how much of my hundred's left, and give me a check for the balance. I resume rusticating forthwith."

"Tyrrell knows all about that. There's nothing but the rent to pay out of it, is there?" He left the room, to return in a few minutes with a slip of paper in his hand. "There you are, Laurence. Eighty quid left. You see I'm starting to put faith in you. But how on earth could Reingold have jumped to that price from just seeing those shares in my desk? Old man, I'm sorry."

"Don't you worry. You didn't give the show away, Pat. If you want to know, I shrewdly suspect the Fair Constantia has done us. As to those four or six shares you've got—you haven't taken for 'em, by the way, those you did pay for—I'll settle with you for 'em when I get back to Leith, and if the advice I send you is 'Hold on,' they're to be offered to Miss Stewart at par. If it's 'Sell,' chuck 'em in the fire. Good-by, Pat, old man. It's been a rum sort of month, eh? Good-by." He fled, leaving Dwyer, wild with surprise, calling to him to stay and explain—explain everything.

At Trafalgar Square he bought three postal

orders for twenty shillings each and sent them to Mrs. Jardine inclosed in a letter card. "Please take care of my boxes till I send for them," he asked her, then registered and posted the package, and went out into the street, his month's folly definitely closed, finished, and dead.

The blank afternoon lay before him. There was nothing to do until the departure of the night mail for the north. "What shall it be?" he asked himself. "Moon around and visit the scene of past glories? Lunch at Rupert Street, and get softly sentimental about at? 'Fraid I'm not up to that yet. Better get drunk. Yes, that's the plan. Get tight enough to wish myself back at sea again —I've got to go there, whether I want to or not. Mustn't get run in, and mustn't forget that my bag's at Charing Cross cloakroom, but short of that—'Blithe as the song of a canary.' Good old Emerson!"

He drank, now steadily, now intermittently, until evening, but did not fail to remember his bag, and traveling by underground to King's Cross, spent the night at being whirled back to his purgatory at Leith—a purgatory now utterly and irrevocably stripped of any hope of paradise to follow.

He could not sleep. The whisky he had drunk turned to bright-eyed and preternat-

urally acute wakefulness, and the rattling of the train forbade even a moment's relaxation from his pain. As he sat in the carriage new tortures came one by one to burn and sear him. Marion, now rich, would be sought in marriage. Vivid imagination, strung up to concert pitch by alcohol, deprived him of no one single detail. How did the society notices begin? "We have it on the best authority that a marriage will shortly be solemnized between Miss Marion Stewart, daughter of the late Blank Stewart, Esq., of Somersetshire, and——" The prospective bridegroom's name necessarily was wanting, but the thought maddened him none the less on that account. Then would follow smug journalistic comments on Miss Stewart's romantic story. All the wretched tale of his father's downfall must inevitably be dragged up again. His part, too, would probably leak out—the son chosen by fate to replace the goods the father stole. No newspaper could resist such a temptation as that. He wondered where he would be when he read it or heard of it, if ever he heard of it at all, and even such a detail as the picture of a bundle of papers being thrown from the weekly steamer into his dinghy came vividly prophetic. Ah! but he wouldn't be at sea. He'd promised to go to the office now. But that

was impossible. It must be the sea again. God send him a speedy drowning. If only he hadn't to go to Iceland he could drop it all now. It was only to open the door, make one step into the flying darkness, and be at rest. Work first, though. Once let him get that wire dispatched, and then there were a hundred ways of leaving it all behind.

From time to time a station flashed by with a roar and rattle and blur of lights, breaking the thread of his sullen musings, but always they began again at the same starting-point—Marion herself. Again and again his mind would wander into the unknown, devising her future—always to be spent with another man; and each repetition gave him new and more and more maddening details—twisted fresh thongs of thought with which to lash his breaking heart. She need no longer wear winter dresses at midsummer now. Her means would allow her to dress as he would have wished her to. Being beyond all things fair, and rich as well, she would have many suitors, no one of them such a hard brute as himself, no one of them worshiping her so, but men who still retained the breeding and education he had lost—soft-handed liars, he thought to himself. And then, her marriage, and a happy life afterwards. He pictured her, loved and loving, a serene-eyed mother

of children at five-and-thirty—in the prime of her married life. And then, just as he had completely forgotten all his surroundings, just as he felt he must dash his tightly gripped fist through the window, cutting and tearing his hands with the broken glass to relieve this other unbearable agony, flash would go another station by. At the start he would pull himself together with a gasp, breathe heavily once or twice, and begin turning the slow wheel of thought again, impotently raging, until the lights and noise of another station broke for a moment the unending succession of tortures.

He reached Leith about seven on Sunday morning, unshaven, wild-eyed, and haggard. Leaving his bag at Anstruther's, he went to Harper's house without making any attempt at a toilet, and entered its door for the first time since he had removed to the lower part of the town.

CHAPTER XIX

Clement Harper was not yet up, a sleepy maid informed him, but she would announce his arrival. Meanwhile, would Mr. Averil wait in the dining-room? He sat before the grate containing the ashes of the previous night's fire, feeling cold, lonely, and miserable. Whisky and a used tumbler stood upon the table beside a full ash-tray, and he threw some of the spirit into the dirty glass and drank it neat with a view to freshening his wits. When Harper came down—his dressing-gown was testimony to the urgency of the occasion—he smelt it directly and looked at Laurence coldly and keenly.

"It's ower early for drinkin'," he said sourly, as Laurence rose. "Ye're back sooner than I expected ye." Then, on sighting Laurence's haggard face, "Mercy on us a'! What's wrang wi' ye, mon?"

"Is it my beard?" Laurence asked stupidly, passing his hand over his blue chin.

"That? No. I see ye've taken it off—an' ye want a shave, too—but that's not it. Ye're a wreck, man alive. What ha' ye been doing?"

"I expect I do look cheap. I was drunk last night, and I couldn't sleep in the train,——"

Harper made a gesture of anger.

"An' ye're nipping now, first thing in the morning! Ye fool! Ye weary me. What do ye want?"

"I want to borrow a trawler, Mr. Harper," Laurence began, humbly enough.

"For why?"

"I want to go to Iceland and back as quickly as ever I can. I want to get there before the Wednesday boat."

"Why don't ye ask to borrow the whole fleet? Ye've enough cursed impudence."

"It's not impudence—I don't mean it to be, at least. It's very important. I'll pay for crew and coal and the use of the boat."

"I'll see ye do—if I let ye have her. But, first of all, I want to know the meaning of this wild-goose chase."

"I can't tell you, Mr. Harper," Laurence said. He felt disheartened and unhappy. Full of the importance of his mission, and set upon its fulfillment as he was, he had never anticipated any opposition here. Yet now Harper seemed none too ready to oblige him, and without his aid he would be reduced to going by the passenger boat. That meant

three days' delay, and, stupefied by drink and sleeplessness as he was, a fear that Mortimer & Reingold might send a representative by the same boat seemed little less than certainty.

"I can't tell you," he repeated. "It's not my business, Mr. Harper. I must have the boat."

"If it's none of your business, I'll not aid you in meddling with other people's," Harper said. "Ye'll get no boat from me. Ye're daft, man. Comin' here at this hour o' the morning to rout me out of my bed to borrow a trawler as cool as if ye were askin' for a light for your pipe! And then ye can't tell me why ye want it. Ye're drunk now, ye wastrel fool! I'm weary o' ye, Laurence Averil. I've done my best for ye. I've found ye a living for two years and offered ye a better. I gave ye a month to think over coming into the office, and after five weeks ye come back drunk—drunk, on a Sabbath morning—and ask to borrow a trawler. What next'll ye do?"

"I'm not drunk," Laurence said steadily. "I've only had one drink—your whisky—since last night. I want to borrow a trawler for this one cruise. I shall be back in a fortnight—and that'll be within the seven weeks I asked you for—and then I'm ready to come

to the office, if you're still inclined to have me there."

"I'm none so sure I am. Ye look as if ye'd been drunk for a week, and unless ye drop the habits o' the fleet I've little use for ye.

Now, about this trawler. Tell me why ye want it, and if there's any reason I choose to approve, ye shall have it. Ye'll pay crew and coal, as ye said, and ye'll pay me fifteen pounds over an' above for the use of the boat. If ye won't tell me why ye want her, ye won't have her—that's all."

"All right," Laurence said. "Then I must

tell you. But promise to hold your tongue."

"I'll promise that; but, mind ye, I make no promise of letting ye have the boat. Go on."

"Do you remember selling those farms at Langholt to my father?"

"I do. Well?"

"You remember when Clitheroe was killed on the *Westray?* I went ashore to bury him, as you know, and while I was waiting there I went out to Uthlid rock. I had the horrors on me that day, I think. I'd been drinking, and the boy's death upset me.

"Anyhow, I sat down under the rock and had a smoke, and—and while I was there I thought the stone lying around the rock looked to be queer stuff, and I kicked off a bit to bring home."

"Lava?"

"No—nor anything like lava. There's the piece I kicked off." He handed it to Harper. "Is that lava?—you ought to know."

"It's no lava, certainly. It's——?"

"Malachite. That's what it is, if you want to know. I've been in London trying to buy the shares of the company. But the tale's leaked out somehow, and the price has got beyond me. It's not high now, but I can't pay it. And I want to go and see how big a deposit it is before doing anything further. As

the story has got out of my hands I want to get away before anyone can go on the weekly passenger boat. See?''

''I see. Are you sure the stuff is malachite?''

''Certain. You can take that piece to an expert if you like.''

''Who is the present owner of the shares?''

''A woman. She's—her father was the old chap my father cheated.''

''And ye want to cheat the daughter? Father and son. Ye'll have no boat o' mine.''

''Oh, *hell!*'' Laurence raged. ''Must I tell you every cursed thing I'm trying to forget? Man alive, she's the world to me. I'd lie down and put her little foot on my throat. I was courting her all I knew when I found this business out—that she was the owner of the land. But she had another offer for the shares by the same post as mine—twice as much, too. And now I'm off to see what the find is worth. If it's all right, I shall tell her to hold on; if it's wrong, she can sell. Now, do you see, curse you?''

''I see. I'm sorry, Laurie, lad. Ye shall have the *Columba*. She's the fastest boat I have in harbor, and she was for sea to-morrow, so ye'll find her ready, coaled an'—an' all. Get away as soon as ye please.''

"I want the gear out of her," Laurence said.

"As ye like. I wouldn't, if I were you. She's nigh as fast loaded as she is light—and if ye take out her gear ye'll need ballast."

"More coal'll do that."

"Ah! Ye mean shoving her along? Dinnae start a boiler tube. 'Mair haste, less speed,' ye know. The men'll not work today. Ye'll start at midnight getting the stuff out."

"I start within an hour from now," Laurence said. "The crew'll work if I tell 'em. If they won't, there'll be a few men down there that'll take their places for me. Give me a note to the skipper, Mr. Harper, and I'll go about my business. I want another drink to buck me up, and then I'm off."

While Clement Harper wrote he drank again, for wretchedness and want of sleep were taking hold on him once more, and within the hour he was back at Anstruther's.

A knot of men were standing idling at the bottom of the wynd in which the house stood. He passed the door, and went down to them. Jock Menzies was among them, with three or four more he knew, but they all looked at him sullenly, without recognition.

"Morning," he said shortly. "Where's Guthrie?"

Menzies knew his voice, and looked at him with surprise. "It's Averil come back again," he said.

"It is. Where's Guthrie—d'ye hear?"

"Which Guthrie dae ye want?" one of the men asked.

Laurence referred to the envelope in his hand.

"'A. Guthrie,'" he read aloud. "Skipper of the *Columba*," he added.

"Alec. He'll be at home, like enow. What brings ye back, Averil?"

"Work. Where does Guthrie live?"

They gave him long and contradictory directions, Laurence listening, muddled and bemused. Unable to grasp the gist of what they said, he turned to Menzies. "Take this note to him, Big Jock," he commanded. "Bring back the answer to me at Anstruther's within half an hour. I'm going to change my clothes."

Menzies looked up sulkily. "I'm no' your servant, Laurence Averil," he said.

Laurence flew at him with an oath and struck him on the chest.

"I've been away too long, have I?" he roared. "Not my servant, eh?—you dog. Do as I tell you, or, by Heaven! I'll break your jaw first and drag you there by the beard afterwards."

Menzies departed on his mission without a word, and Laurence addressed the little group of men.

"Any of you on the *Columba?*" he asked.

One of them happened to be a member of the crew, and on him Laurence straightly laid commands.

"The trawl and gear's to come out o' her before night," he said. "Get a move on you and beat up the crew, and send 'em down to the wharfside to start. I can't spare time to kick all of you to your duty, so if any man refuses, take the next that offers. I'll give a sovereign to the man that takes his place. We sail to-night, and there's a matter of ten ton of extra coal to be put on board when the fishing gear comes out. Get the key of the coal shed from the storekeeper—tell him I said it was Mr. Harper's orders. Tell the fireman to get steam up. I'll be ashore most of the day. I've work to do. If I find that the coal isn't aboard and the trawl and gear on the wharf when I come down in the afternoon, some of you'll curse the day ye first saw your mothers. Now, get about it. If I'm wanted ye'll find me at Anstruther's, or they'll know where I'm gone."

Menzies was back within the half-hour, and was sent to the bedroom in which Laurence was flinging off his clothes, replacing them

with those he was accustomed to wear at sea.

"Guthrie says he'll no' worrk on the Sabbath," he announced. "An' the *Columba* won't sail before the morrn."

"You go back to him and tell him to go to the deuce," Laurence said cheerfully. "The *Columba* sails to-night, and if he hasn't turned up she'll go without him. I'll be skipper, and his 'blessed Sawbath' 'll have lost him a fortnight's work."

All through the day Laurence labored strenuously, persuading here, pleading or ordering there, by promises or oaths getting stores sent down to the wharf, or receiving and answering messages sent up from the boat. The town was shuttered in the forbidding silence of a Scottish Sunday. All things seemed to conspire to delay him, and in the encountering and overcoming of obstacles he almost forgot the pain at his heart. At four o'clock in the afternoon he drove on to the wharfside with his bag and a small but heavy case, and shouted to one of the crew to come and aid him in getting it aboard the boat. "Handle that tenderly," he ordered. "It's dynamite, and if you drop it you'll go where the devil wait's you quicker than you want to. Is steam up?"

It was, and by five o'clock the *Columba's* bows were swinging outwards towards the

waters of the Firth, her churning screw, now ahead, now astern, thrashing farewell to the land.

At the last moment the men broke into open mutiny. "We've nae food aboord," they cried, and one of the bolder spirits jumped upon the bulwarks with a view to springing towards the slowly receding wharf. Laurence swung him on to the deck before he had time to leap. "Then you'll starve," he said grimly. "The more reason to make her move. We're for Iceland, and if ye shove her along you'll get a bellyful of dried fish inside of four days." He said nothing about the packages of stores he had sent on board, which the men, ignorant of their nature, had placed in his cabin. They were amply sufficient for all hands, but all his harder nature was revived by his return to the old vile surroundings, and the dull misery in which his soul was steeped called aloud for the relief of open strife.

The scuffle that ensued was as brutal a rough-and-tumble as he could have desired. Two of the hands, with the fear of a voyage on short commons before them, rushed at him together. "He's daft," they cried. "Averil's daft!" and, crying to the fireman to aid them, they attacked him savagely. For the next five minutes Laurence's mental torture stood off from him under the stimulus of combat;

at the end of that time one man lay under the bulwarks groaning; another, with a twisted ankle, was crawling forward on hands and knees; and the third, uninjured, had seized an iron belaying pin and was standing on the defensive. Laurence's mouth was a smudge of blood, one of his eyes was closing rapidly, and a blow on his left wrist had rendered the hand nearly useless; but he smiled sweetly, for all his disfigured face, and cursed the men with great good will.

"Daft, am I?" he demanded. "An' I've forgotten how to scrap, too—eh? You get about your work, you swine. You—at the wheel—keep her a point more east.

"I've brought grub aboard, and you'll get your share—though you don't deserve it. And if any of you want another turn up with me, you know how to get it. I'll teach you Laurence Averil's come back to the fleet no prettier than he left it."

The fireman grinned, replacing the belaying pin in its rack. "I've heerd o' you before," he said. "Nae wonder Jock Menzies is sae pretty mannered these last months," and he went below about his work. Laurence laughed back. In truth, he was himself surprised to find how easily the old life came to him again. In the old days he had known no greater wretchedness, but compared to this

new hell of hopeless desire its roughness seemed light, its brutality a kindly counter-irritant to a far greater pain. He walked the deck, now getting more and more lively as they reached open water, with some dim feeling of gratitude in his heart at the relief. The hurry of departure left much to be done, and he busied himself setting the men at one task after another until Fifeness was abeam, when, laying a course that should clear Buchan Ness, he went into the engine room, told the engineer to spare no coal, and retired to his berth to seek the sleep he so sorely needed.

CHAPTER XX

The next day dawned fine and warm, and the men, finding Laurence's stores far better in quality than they would themselves have bought, were in high good will. Moreover, the trawl-gear having been left ashore, there was nothing in the way of work to be done beyond the ordinary ship's duties; and though pay, it was true, seemed problematical, there being no catch to share, Laurence's answer to their inquiries tended to allay their anxiety on that score.

"You'll get four pounds apiece for the cruise," he told them, when asked. "If we do it under four days each way I'll make it a pound a head more. If we take longer—well, you'll hear of it, I promise you." So, telling off a deck hand to aid the fireman at the raging furnaces, all hands made up their minds to what they—fresh from the endless labor of the fishing voyages—were ready enough to regard as a pleasure trip.

They drove her furiously. Once—on the second day out—the engineer reported a leaky standard-junction forward of the fire-box, and

Laurence, refusing to allow the speed to be reduced by a single revolution, crammed himself down into the stifling space next the bulkhead with a line under his armpits, and plastered the glowing eye of light with some filthy composition recommended by the engineer. He was more dead than alive when he was hauled on deck, but the consciousness that the flaw had been rectified without delaying the voyage did more to aid his recovery than the fresh air itself, though a great girth of sailcloth with which he had stuffed the front of his clothes was brown and crisp with the heat, and the toes of his boots were positively charred. The weather continued fine, as fine as it had been for the last two months, and the early dawn of Thursday morning brought a hammering at the companion door leading to his cabin.

"We've earrnt oor extra pund," a voice cried. "Porrtland's ahead on the starboard bow."

"How far?" Laurence demanded, wide awake at the word.

"Aboot nine miles."

"Then change her course a couple o' points east. I'll be on deck in a minute."

He dressed hastily and ascended the stair, and the first object his eye fell on past the bulwarks was the dim form of the promon-

tory he remembered so well, lying like a low cloud upon the northern horizon.

But delays awaited him. On nearing the shore a white line of surf on the beach, the thunder of which came up against the wind only as a dim murmur, showed that the favoring southerly breeze that had aided them the past two days had raised a sea which rendered landing a matter of difficulty, if not danger. The native boats were hauled up out of its reach, and there was no sign of life about the cottages. Probably the inhabitants were engaged on inland pursuits until a calm allowed them again to launch their boats.

He ordered the dinghy overside, nevertheless, and anchoring the trawler a mile off shore, went with two men to inspect the state of things. The fellows at the oars waxed fearful and uttered dire warnings, but, having given explicit directions, Laurence drove the boat headlong on shore. As she touched all three men leaped out, grasping the gunwales, and though the next roller swept them off their feet. They were able, sprawling and tumbling, to run the boat out of reach of the crested smother of water that followed it, and sat on the shingle wet through and gasping.

They were about to begin more complaints, but catching Laurence's eye, refrained. "How about the dynamite?" one asked.

"Ye'll never get the stuff ashore that way —if ye want it ashore. The first bump we'll all go sky high together."

Laurence saw reason in the remark, and despaired again, until the memory of the river near by, the Kirthafljot, came to him. Leaving the men by the boat to dry their clothes in the sun as best they were able, he walked the intervening mile across the beach to its mouth. It ran over the shingle in a rapid muddy waterslide about two feet deep, pushing back the surf with its force. Over its lower end the hungry waves advanced, roaring again and again, only to be beaten back in confused whirlpools as the glacier-fed flood, now in summer spate, resumed its resistless rush. A worse landing-place could scarcely be conceived, but noting that if capsizing could be avoided it was not impossible for a moment to steady a boat in the current, Laurence resolved to make the attempt.

He returned to the men. At his orders they placed their wet clothes in the boat, and, nearly naked, tried to run her out again through the surf. Three times they were swept back, each time narrowly escaping breaking the dinghy to matchwood, and when they did finally get past the hammering breakers the boat was full of water, and all three men were nearly exhausted. Laurence alone

was happy—happier than he had been since the start of the voyage. The monotony of the last three days, broken only by the episode of the fire-box, had nearly sent him to drink again. Perhaps nothing but the necessity of keeping a clear head had saved him; and this wild wet toil came as a distraction from the endless round of unhappy meditation that bade fair to break him on the slow wheel of thought. He baled the boat as the men rowed back to the trawler; and then, taking the dynamite, parceled in cloth and tied with four long dangling rope ends, into the rocking dinghy, they rowed, aided by a third hand, back towards the river's mouth.

Waiting for a wave longer than the rest, Laurence rapped out a quick order, and the boat, propelled by one last mighty pull at the oars, shot over its crest and ran perhaps twice its length up the shallow stream, plowing into the furious rush of water with a run that sent the fresh ice-cold spray over them in sheets. All four men leaped out, lifting the parcel of dynamite by the rope ends and allowing the boat to slide back into the surf. The force of the stream, well over their knees, nearly swept them off their feet; the dinghy, caught in the roar of a following wave, was smashed to fragments close behind them; but at Laurence's shout they turned

and staggered to the bank with their precious burden, depositing it safely on the beach and shouting like boys at their success.

"But t' boat's gone, Averil," said one of them at length. "How will we get off again?"

"Time enough to bother about that," he told them. "Here's work to do ashore first. When we've done we'll swim—or steal an Icelander's boat," he added, for the reckless joy of successful struggle was in his veins.

They unpacked the dynamite, repacking it in two parcels, each slung from shoulder ropes; and in an hour Laurence was leading them carefully across the bare wilderness, now warm with summertime, that he had traversed in those cold and weary hours two months before.

It took the little party with their dangerous load two hours to reach Uthlid rock. The heat, to thickly clad, heavily loaded men, was overpowering, and the abundance of flies surprised Laurence greatly. The road was rough, too. Once past the silent and deserted settlement it was necessary to scramble up and down over a constant succession of slippery lava hummocks, their faces and edges hard and sharp as polished steel; and the route that Laurence, stupefied with drink and misery, had traversed without notice in the

chill of early spring, proved a difficult matter for a body of men loaded with dangerous explosives to negotiate in the scorching midday of the brief northern summer. They were done up and exhausted, their nerves unstrung by occasional slips of booted feet on the bare lava, the surface of which gave but insecure foothold, long before they reached the rock. When they were within half a mile of it, Laurence ordered one of the packages to be left, and the four men together carried the other to the foot of the great boulder. There was no need for excavation, even had tools for the purpose been at hand. The poor mold that lay between the broken masses of malachite was easily removed by hand. He distributed the heavy cartridges he had brought between three of the cavities, and sent the men back to the other package while he affixed the fuses. Then with one last glance upwards at the great wall of hard tufa that centuries of weathering had barely smoothed, he set light to them and ran for dear life.

They were arranged to burn for ten minutes—and Laurence never lived a longer ten minutes in his life. The ground was hard and rough; his sea-boots of a sudden seemed to have become as heavy as lead; and he scrambled and ran, jumping from boulder to

boulder like a man in a nightmare. Once he slipped, and imagining a twisted ankle, even before he touched ground, his blood ran cold with fear. But he was up again next minute, and threw himself down by the waiting men, sweating and gasping for breath, a full minute before the charge exploded.

Then!—a roar that seemed to shake the very ground, and that echoed from hill to hill, progressing faint and ever fainter towards the great glacier-topped uplands of the interior. A mighty and beautiful plume of white smoke jetted high into the sunlight, and wafted inland before the breeze in the direction of Asaa. As it cleared they looked anxiously at the rock, expecting to see no more of it; but as the white cloud around it was dispersed by the southerly wind, a stump full half its original height slowly emerged, still standing.

Without waiting a moment, Laurence set off towards the scene of his labors, telling the men to remain where they were. On reaching the spot he found the hollow had entirely vanished, its lava walls having been blown completely away. The turf and mold that had formed its carpet had also gone, leaving a pit with sides and bottom of dark gray shale. Over the spot where the malachite had been an enormous wedge-shaped

slab of tufa, detached from the summit of the rock, had slid down when the base of the rock had been destroyed, and all traces of the malachite were hidden completely.

He went back to within shouting distance of the men, and called to them to bring up the remainder of the dynamite, sending up a fervent prayer that the quantity he had brought would be sufficient for his purpose. When they arrived he crawled beneath the great wedge and found a vacant space under a portion of the rock base that had escaped destruction. In this he placed his cartridges, reflecting that he would have to take care to crawl out without delay, and again sending the men to the rear, he fitted and lighted the last of the fuses.

Crawling out from that crack was the most awful ordeal that Laurence Averil had ever undergone. His movements were perforce deliberate; any hurry, any change from the exact direction in which he had entered, and he might stick fast, for the crack between the rocks was narrow in the extreme. In places he had to crawl sideways, his weight on the hand beneath him, and there was not room to bend his knees more than a handsbreadth from the straight. In thought he suffered death a hundred times, as, with teeth set and slow and careful motions, he edged himself

towards outer air, the fuses fizzing merrily behind him. Once in the open he ran like a deer, reaching safety just as the second explosion occurred; and not until the smoke had blown completely away did he rise to a sitting position, his breath drawn in sobs between his teeth, to look at its work.

This time no trace of the rock remained. With the piled-up lava that had buttressed it behind, it was strewn in shattered fragments over a circle a quarter of a mile across. He stood at the edge of the great pit the explosions had made and looked over its naked surface intently. Then he rubbed his eyes and looked again, and then descended into the hollow to carefully scrutinize every portion of its interior.

But careful scrutiny only told him again the truth he had learned in that first glance. An unbroken face of shale met his view on every side of the pit, except where a cavity had become filled with once molten lava, and of malachite there was not a trace! and all his dreams, first for himself and then for Marion, had vanished into thin air—had drifted away into nothingness with the smoke of the two explosions!

The men, advancing, stood upon the brink above him, regarding the destruction with astonishment. He scrambled up to them to

search among the débris of rock for a fragment of malachite. Two or three small pieces lay upon the lava, and he picked one up and showed it to them.

"See that green stuff?" he said. "That's what I'm looking for. Never mind any bits lying about here. Get into the pit and see if you can find any left stuck in the sides. There's a sovereign for the man who sees it first."

They searched for a couple of hours, Laurence going carefully over the ground after them, but not a trace of malachite was visible, and the stratified lines of the shale ran in unbroken regularity all round the excavation. At the end of that time he rose erect, straightening his back. "All right," he said. "That'll do. We need waste no longer time here. Now to find a boat," and the four men set off on their return to Langholt.

The inhabitants, alarmed at the explosions, had returned to their house, and two of the men met them when half-way to the shore. Laurence told them to return, saying that he wanted a boat. When they understood his Danish they shook their heads, saying that the surf was too high for one to be launched, but they walked back to the beach in company with the party. Once there, the first of the boats was taken by force and thrown into the

breakers, no permission being asked of the owners, and Laurence, taking no notice of the Icelanders' cries, grasped one man by the collar and flung him in after it. The boat, being heavier than the smashed dinghy, rode off at the first attempt, the men hauling the weeping native on board as they shipped the oars. At the trawler's side Laurence gave him a sovereign, leaving him to beach the ungainly looking pram as best he might; and once aboard he gave orders to get under way at once, only going below to change his clothes when the anchor was up and the screw had begun to revolve.

When he came on deck an hour later Iceland was fading away to the northward, and long before the clear gray light of midnight had briefly replaced the summer sun it was gone from sight—as utterly gone as his golden dreams of but two short weeks before.

CHAPTER XXI

Marion Stewart stood as Laurence had left her, dumb with surprise. In the course of a single forenoon she had received an offer that raised her to what she considered unheard-of affluence, and had asked Laurence for advice —more as an excuse to tell him of her good fortune, it is true, than because she desired any advice at all. He had told her to refuse —refuse!—this most providential of offers; had informed her he was the son of the man who had ruined and killed her own father, and then had walked off, his manner as serenely matter-of-course as though such revelations were to him but daily events.

As he had anticipated, her surprise gave way to slow anger. That he, the son of that miscreant, that villain, Herman Averil, had ever dared even to speak to her! And he had kissed her!—against her will, it was true, but still, kissed her he certainly had. The offense had rankled less in her mind this last week—some queer feeling that was not all antipathy had blended with it—but now this *bouleversement* of everything brought back her first impression of his hatefully masterful

bearing, and she rubbed her mouth, half unconsciously, with the back of her little glove.

How dared he even to speak to her? But perhaps he had only known when he saw her letters that Fate had so linked their parents together. Whether he knew or not, he was bad—bad all through—of bad stock. No wonder he had gone away as he had. He dared not stay, the coward! Oh that she could tell him bitterly what she felt towards him and his father! Her two past years of strife and some of her early discouragements —the strife and discouragements that lie about the lonely and pretty woman's path—came to her mind, and she paled with anger. Well for him he had fled. "Coward, coward," she said—and, in her heart, knew she was lying. Well, brute, then. Detestable, hateful, and vile he had been, even—even if he wasn't afraid of things. She sat down and thought it all over. Could he have known anything of the circumstances of her father's case? She thought not, but reconsidering the fact of his friendship with Dwyer, left that question for the time unanswered. In any case, Dwyer's offer was outbidden. Laurence had said so himself. And she was to go to him for advice. She decided to do so on Monday. Meanwhile she would get a map of Iceland

and some books and try to learn something of the place. She remembered it was sulphur her father had anticipated finding there, but, short of that, she remembered little of the catastrophe that had ended his days and turned her adrift to shift for herself.

She walked home slowly, to find Laurence had gone, and after the excitement of the morning the day dragged wearily and uneventfully. She went to the Exhibition in the evening, but returned early. Hating him as she was sure she did, she would not admit even to herself that his absence spoiled her pleasure; but although her good fortune was vividly present to her when she went to bed, some unformed feeling within her dulled its brightness. Was it regret that he had gone? she asked herself. No—a thousand times no. How could she possibly regret having seen the last of him? She fell asleep trying to find justly opprobrious terms in which to describe his effrontery and wickedness.

On Monday she went to Dwyer & Tyrrell, to be received with the respect due to a client with thousands of broad acres beneath her sway. As an obsequious clerk ushered her into Dwyer's private room, she compared her reception with that which she had encountered only a few days before when she had called for Webster's address, and the altera-

tion gave her warm delight. She entered with her little chin up, doing her best to seem oblivious of the fact that she still wore her array of springtime, and her haughty demeanor made Pat Dwyer chuckle inwardly. Laurence's bare admission that he knew her name, coupled with his instructions before departure, had excited his curiosity. Remembering Constance Armitage's visit and anxious demand for his address, he had believed her to be the source of his knowledge of Mortimer & Reingold's offer, and of the name of the holder of the shares; but at sight of Marion's delicate, cameo-like face and slender figure, he began to understand more clearly how things stood. "Quixotic ass," he said to himself, and turned his attention to this new client.

"Miss Stewart?" he interrogated, consulting the card she had sent in.

She bowed.

"You have called about our offer for your holding in the Iceland Development Company?"

"Not altogether. I've received a higher offer from a firm of stockbrokers—Messrs. Mortimer & Reingold—and I have come to you for advice respecting it. Can you tell me anything about the firm? Your own offer, being outbidden, I presume falls to the

ground. A—an acquaintance of mine, a Mr. Averil, told me to come to you."

"Yes?" All Pat's professional manner was needed to conceal his surprise. Laurence had sent her there himself! "Laurence Averil, eh? A good—well, he is a good chap at bottom. That's true. I've known him years. We were at Oxford together. Do you know him well?"

"He is an acquaintance," she repeated coldly. "As I never even knew he had been at college at all, you can see I know very little of him. May I ask your advice respecting these shares?"

"Oh, you won't sell at present, of course. I think I am at liberty to tell you that—er—some valuable minerals have been discovered on the ground. The fact has leaked out, somehow, and consequently there is every probability of the price of your shares rising higher, so that your proper course is to keep them in your own hands at present."

"Leaked out? How—who made the discovery?" But she had no need to ask. She knew.

"That I am not at liberty to say."

"And—has Mr. Averil instructed you to withdraw his first offer for the shares?" she hazarded.

Pat looked at her keenly. Laurence, after

telling him his name was not to transpire, had bolted without explanations and left him groping in the dark.

"What offer?" he said innocently.

"This." She tapped Dwyer's own letter with an accusing finger. "I—I saw Mr. Averil on Saturday, and—and I understood the offer came from him."

"Oh, if he told you so——" said Pat, trapped.

She jesuitically congratulated herself on keeping within the limits of strict truth. "Did he instruct you to withdraw?"

"Yes. It wasn't important that he should do so, of course. The other offer settled that. I rather fancy he thought it would clear the way for us—our advising you, you know."

"He's returned to Leith, I believe?"

Pat nodded.

"Thank you. That's all now, I think." She rose to go. "I am to keep the shares until you instruct me to sell. Is that right?"

"Quite right." He rose and opened the door for her. "Good-morning."

She went down the stairs in a greater rage with Laurence than ever. So he had found this stuff—whatever it was—and had come to London with the deliberate intention of cheating her out of her shares. No wonder he had been so upset when she told him his offer was

insufficient—the cheat! And when his wicked plans had been frustrated, he had run away. He *was* a coward, too, after all. With a woman's reasoning, she pushed aside the few facts that interfered with her theory. True, he had reeled and shown all the signs of agitation before she had shown him the second letter, but her first words had informed him the offer was five hundred pounds, and that must have told him his own efforts were fruitless. The mean, cowardly cheat! How she hated him!—Yes, she really did hate him now. On reflection, only one doubt came to assail her. If he had told her to wait a few days, he could have made a larger offer than five hundred pounds for the shares, and, acting on his advice, she would probably have accepted it. Why hadn't he done that? she wondered. She must beware. Perhaps he intended doing it even now. Could it be that Dwyer was in collusion with him? She shook her head sagely, suspecting all men, and reserved to herself the right to accept or decline Dwyer's advice when it was forthcoming.

Tuesday morning brought another letter from yet another stockbroker. It was incited by Clement Harper's London agent, if she had but known it. Clement had decided that no harm could come and much good might possibly accrue from a judicious agitation

respecting the Iceland shares, and the barely worded inquiry as to the terms on which she would part with ordinary stock was the direct result of his action. She went straight to the office from which the inquiry was dated, and was able to discover that it came from Leith. As a natural result, she attributed it to the evil machinations of the unspeakable Laurence—who at that moment was grilling on a fire-box, like a later incarnation of his own patron saint, in her service—and her refusal to state terms was as shortly worded as politeness would allow. She told Dwyer of the letter, however, and Pat saw that the inquiry was discreetly advertised in the proper channels. When it came to Reingold's ears he fell into a profuse state of perspiration.

"There'th thome thing in that tale of your'th, Harry," he told Mortimer. "There'th more of 'em after thothe cuthed thareth of Averil'th. Where'th that girl'th letter?" He glanced over it and wrote again to Marion, asking her to state her own price for ordinary shares.

She took the letter to Dwyer.

"I hardly know what to advise you," he said, perplexed. "Definite offers below par of course you should refuse, but this is different. Will you allow me to answer it?"

"What shall you say?" she asked.

"I'll ask double the price of the shares," he told her. "They'll refuse that, but it'll show them we're not ignorant of their value. Will that do?"

"I am in your hands," she said, and Pat wrote accordingly.

Reingold tore his hair when the letter arrived. "Look at it!" he cried to his partner. "There'th that blathted Dwyer at it again now. Harry, my boy, we're out of thith. We've been done by that pup. To think we wath directorth of the company a fortnight ago!"

Mortimer looked at the letter stolidly.

"We'll buy," he said, mindful of Constance's advice. "We'll buy the ruddy lot. Sixteen hundred quid! and we could have got 'em for the asking. It's heart-breaking—but six per cent. on ten thou. debentures is only six hundred quid a year, and if the tale I've heard is right there should be a thundering sight more than that in it. We'll become good little industrial investors with money to spend for once, Reiny. Anyhow, we shall have the control of the biz if we've all the ordinaries." And Dwyer's surprise and disgust when the acceptance reached him next morning nearly deprived him of speech.

"I'm sorry, Miss Stewart," he told Marion, who, summoned by wire, sat in the office, radi-

ant. "I never imagined they would look at it —and yet here's their check. What on earth Laurence will say——" He stopped short.

"What's Mr. Averil got to do with it?" Marion demanded sharply.

"He—he—well, he told me I should advise you to hold on. Perhaps these shares would have gone higher, you know."

"Perhaps *he* would have had time to make an offer through another agent?" Marion suggested scornfully.

"Laurence! What do you mean?" Dwyer was wide-eyed with surprise and indignation. "Do you imagine Laurence would—would try and get them behind your back in that way? Besides, he can't—he hasn't the money."

"I thought he was rich?"

"He isn't, then. He's a poor man. If you remember, that offer of two hundred was to be paid in two instalments. He only had a hundred pounds to his name."

"And I've made sixteen hundred—one thousand six hundred pounds—off less than a tenth of what he offered me two hundred for. Do you call that honorable?"

"He—he didn't know you were the holder of the shares."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"I don't know—perhaps it hasn't anything.

But you must remember nobody thought the shares of any value then."

"Nobody except himself, and he *knew*. And now I can get twice their face value for them."

"For ordinaries—yes. But they're only a gamble, you see. Under no circumstances can you expect to get much more than face value for your debentures. You must remember that. If all goes well, you might—might, I say, mind you—you *might* get a hundred and five or a hundred and ten for each debenture. Not more."

"Why can't I get as much for them as the other shares?" she asked; and Pat, in a long explanation as to the respective qualities of debentures and ordinary stock, was able to lead the conversation away from Laurence and his criminal tendencies.

For the next week Marion enjoyed herself hugely. For the first time in her life she had money to spend without having to count every penny, and she displayed a taste in clothing and amusements that made her landlady and very real friend, Mrs. Jardine, quake with apprehension. She dragged that long-suffering body from the theater to the milliner's, and from concert-hall to showroom, at a rate that barely allowed her time to throw up her hands and say, "Well! well!" in a faint

crescendo, at each new departure. She spent nearly a hundred pounds of her new capital in ten days, and, in satisfying her womanly yearning for pleasures and pretty things, was able to congratulate herself on having had her money's worth. Then came a letter from Dwyer, and she attended the office again, fashionably dressed, bright with anticipation, and altogether a very different being from the meek little workwoman that had first come there seeking an address.

She sank into a chair with a luxurious rustle. "And what is it now, Mr. Dwyer?" she asked merrily. "More fortunes for me?"

"'Fraid not." Dwyer looked serious. "Fact is, I think you won't make much more out of the shares. You've got to begin to try and sell your debentures now."

"Why?"

"The deposit has proved to be only a surface one," he told her. "We—we've had a representative there, and his report is discouraging—fatal, in fact."

"When did you hear?"

"We had a wire last night, followed by a letter this morning. I—I hope you won't be disappointed, but the fact is, I'm afraid you'll have some difficulty in getting those debentures off your hands. You see, they're either worthless paper, or they're such good securi-

ties that people would be surprised at your trying to get rid of them, and they'll naturally be suspicious of them."

"What representative have you sent there?"

"That I am afraid I cannot tell you."

"You needn't. I know. It's Mr. Averil. I don't believe a word of it. He's trying to let down the price of shares, so that he can buy."

Annoyed as Dwyer was, he yet could scarcely keep from laughing in her face. "The idea!" he said. "But it's no use keeping in the fact, Miss Stewart. The advice does come from Laurence, and if you're wise, you'll get rid of your debentures as soon as possible—and be grateful to him. If it weren't for him, you wouldn't have got a penny—and even at the worst, you've made sixteen hundred pounds."

"Yes—for which he offered me two hundred," she said angrily. "He's tried to cheat me all along. I know. I shall not sell."

"Very well. Not that it matters much, I'm afraid. You'll find it difficult to get rid of debentures in any case, as I've told you already. And now, good-morning."

But Marion sat still. "Won't—won't you show me his letter?" she asked.

Pat considered.

"I don't know that there's any reason why

I shouldn't," he said, and handed her a sheet of note-paper and a telegram. The latter was dated from Leith the evening before, and was short. "Sell; letter follows," it said, and she turned to the letter.

"DEAR PAT,"—it ran,—"Here I am again, bad-penny-like. I've been to Langholt as fast as a trawler could take me, and beaten anybody M. & R. could possibly have sent by a week at least."

"What does this mean?" she asked, reading the passage aloud.

"I don't know—can't imagine. He might have had some idea Mortimer & Reingold would send an agent to inquire."

"When their man gets there, he'll find I've done him a good turn. The ground is nicely laid open for his inspection. I stuck half a dozen dynamite cartridges under Uthlid rock, and blew that interesting relic of the ages to Glory, and there's scarcely enough of it left for him to write his name on. As to the malachite!—well, it's gone to Glory, with the rest. The explosion blew a hole in the ground as big as the pit of a small theater, and it's all nicely lined with shale—shale—shale and lava everywhere. Not a speck of anything

else—so that game's up. We made speedy tracks, bagged a native boat—there was a bit of a sea running, and our own was smashed to splinters in landing—chucked an unwilling native into it, and got off to the trawler. Then I recompensed the simple islander with gold, up anchor, and home again, and here I am. Leith to Langholt, a day ashore, and Langholt to Leith, all in eight days, is middling smart moving. Net results: a strained boiler tube or two, a pair of burnt sea-boots and a guernsey to my account, and a smashed dinghy, and no malachite. Now go to Miss Stewart and tell her to sell. M. & R. will probably stand to their offer of five hundred pounds, and she must consider herself lucky if she gets that. My shares you can chuck in the fire."

"What shares?" she demanded, looking up from the letter at Dwyer.

"Eh?" He looked over her shoulders. "Oh, these." He took them from his desk, and showed her. "I bought these four for him."

"What were you going to do with them if the discovery had proved a good one?"

"Laurence left word that they were to be offered to you at par—their face value."

"Did he?" Her face showed her wonderment. "But why?"

"That I must leave to you to guess. He

gave me no reason," Dwyer said. He was still nettled at her suspicions.

She looked at him blankly, then turned to the letter again.

"Have you seen anything of her, Pat? If so, you might drop me a line and tell me how she's looking, and whether she's chanced to mention my name. You may remember our first meeting. She came to your office in a cab with me, seeking the address of Tyrrell's pal, Webster. I saw more of her after that, and if you'll believe me, she asked my advice as to whether she was to accept my offer for those shares. I never knew she was the holder till then, of course. Do you remember once when you were going to tell me her name, and I said I didn't want to know it? 'Easier to rob an abstract nonentity than an individual woman,' I said. And 'she's not the only single woman in the world.' But she is, worse luck. Heigh-ho! I'm not suited for the rôle of love-lorn swain, I fear me.

"Enough of this. Tell her to sell those shares—get a good price for her, old man, and when you've time send me a line to tell me how you've got on and what price they fetched.—Thine, as of yore,

"LAURENCE.

"*P. S.*—Don't forget to tell me how she

looks. I rely on you not to let her get hold of my name."

She sat silently, turning the letter over and over in her hands. "Why did he want his name kept quiet?" she asked at length, her eyes on the floor.

"That, again, I must leave to you to guess. Perhaps he has some idea of buying the shares," he reminded her maliciously.

"The—the expenses of the trip I must make good to you," she said, disregarding the taunt behind his last words.

"They're no expenses of mine. Laurence did the thing off his own bat."

"But I thought you said he had no money?"

"I suppose a hundred pounds is enough to take him to Iceland and back, twice over. If he's been chartering trawlers, overheating boiler tubes, and smashing dinghys, he'll find he's made a hole in his capital, though."

"Why—why should he——" she began. But she knew the truth before her sentence was framed, and sat quietly—very quietly—never speaking.

Dwyer rose and went to the window, stifling an obtrusively artificial yawn, and she blessed him for it as she fumbled for a pocket handkerchief that seemed terribly hard to come at.

She was on her feet winking suspiciously

when he turned to the room again, but the handkerchief had returned to the mysterious recess in which womankind stores such belongings.

She held out her hand. "Goo—good-by, Mr. Dwyer," she said, with her best attempt at composure. "I'm very much obliged for all you've done for me," and glided away silently.

Pat rubbed his nose in deep thought. "I've done my best for you, Laurie, my friend," he said at length, and returned to his correspondence. The tune he whistled softly would have provoked an open rupture if Laurence had been there. It was a dismal rendering of the Wedding March.

CHAPTER XXII

Marion went back to West Kensington as one in a trance, wide-eyed, seeing nothing. The roar of traffic in her ears sunk to the sound of breakers on a beach—such breakers as beat boats into floating pieces of wreckage—and the thunder of the train as it plunged into the underground ways was the thunder rending dynamite echoing in unknown vast solitudes. All the time Laurence's face was before her. Their first meeting—how she had hated him then! At the memory of his kiss the shamed blood ran warmly in her veins and her face flushed—but not as it had flushed before. How strong he was—how masterful. How firmly he had held her—how he had laughed, wickedly and recklessly, when she struck him on the mouth. She remembered his grip of her body, and how she, weakened by the brief struggle, had been drawn to his breast. It was with an entirely new feeling—a feeling she refused to analyze—that the memory came to her now.

And he had left, not to escape her wrath—oh, fool! to think that he could ever fear her puny rage—but to do her service. And she

had deemed him afraid!—What fools women were! She remembered the hatred with which he had spoken of his former life—and now he had gone back to it of his own free will, for her sake. Between the lines of his letter she had read what Dwyer could not read—the weary toil, the accidents of wind and sea, all borne for her.

On arriving home she went straight to her room and laid herself down, her face on the pillow, in silent self-reproach at the injustice she had done him. For an hour she lay there, never stirring, hiding her face from the day, but never hiding from herself for a moment the happy, shameful truth that she loved him—loved him—loved him. And, thank God! he was poor—and she need not go to him with empty hands.

Wondering at her absence, Mrs. Jardine sought her, and at her knock Marion sat bolt upright upon her bed. Her eyes were bright and wet for all the new-found happiness in them, and her pillow was stained with tears. The old woman came in and stood before her.

"Ye've been crying," she said accusingly.

"I haven't," Marion declared stoutly. "But—but I'm going to," and she broke down again in real good earnest, sobbing joyously against the older woman's shoulder.

"Dearie—dear," Mrs. Jardine said, smooth-

ing her hair lightly. "What is it, child? What is it?"

"I c-can't tell you," Marion answered, choking. "It's too long to tell. Let me cry."

The old woman held her gently until her passion of tears was over and she had sniffed herself back to composure, dabbing at her eyes with a wet and crumpled handkerchief the while.

"Now I'm all right," she announced, with a watery smile. "It's no good your asking me anything, you dear old thing, because I shan't tell you. I've been a fool—and now I'm a wise woman. And very soon I—I'm going to be a happy one, I do believe. And that's all." And the landlady, knowing, as a woman, that tears were not incompatible with happiness, asked no more. Also because she was a woman she announced her immediate intention of having tea brought up for the pair of them. But as she went to the door she could not restrain one question.

"Is it a marriage, dearie?" she asked softly. But Marion, with an April face, rushed at her, drove her from the room, and shut the door ungratefully behind her.

"I'm going away to-morrow," she announced, when the tea was produced.

"And where, dearie?"

"To Leith."

"I knew. I knew." The old woman laughed triumphantly. "It's Mr. Averil. Now, isn't it?"

Marion fished out a tea-leaf from her cup and placed it upon the back of one hand, smacking it with the other, after the approved method of divination, until it stuck to her pink palm.

"Yes—No. Yes—No. Yes—No. Yes—No," she said. "There, it's No. Silly thing." She flicked the tea-leaf at the landlady disrespectfully. "Yes—No—and you can choose which answer you like best. Now get me a time-table, and let me see what time I must start."

So intent was she on the packing of the raiment that should reduce Laurence to a due state of subjugation that it was two o'clock before she got to bed, by which time every article of dress in her boxes had been inspected, approved, packed, unpacked again, rejected, and again packed, at least twice over. In her excitement she slept but little, but by ten o'clock next morning was seated in the train, very silently and soberly watching the racing succession of northern suburbs through the carriage window. The eight hours' lonely voyaging reduced her to pitiful nervousness. What should she say to Laurence when she met him? What would he

think of her? Unmaidenly? Her little chin set resolutely at the thought. Whatever he thought she was not going to let convention spoil two lives; and the reflection that her own was one of them—a reflection that would have unnerved most women—only made her the firmer in her determination.

She slept in Edinburgh that night, continuing her journey to Leith on the following morning, and on arrival went straight to Harper's and demanded to see Mr. Averil. He was not in, and the clerk was unable to tell her where he had gone. Would she sit down while he asked Mr. Harper?

A sudden repugnance against speaking, even casually, of her affairs to a clerk came over her. She would see Mr. Harper herself, she said, and sending in her card, was ushered into his private office.

"Please, I want to see Mr. Averil," she demanded, refusing the seat he rose to offer her. If she hesitated now, she was lost.

"He's out, Miss—Miss Stewart," Clement informed her, consulting the card he held in his hand.

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"He'll be on the quayside, I've nae doubt. He'll be here again in about an hour. Will ye not wait?"

"No, thank you," Marion said, moistening her dry lips. "It's—it's very important."

Clement glanced at her keenly, and a sudden light came to him.

"Ye—ye'll be the young lady that owns the Iceland shares?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I'll take the liberty o' asking what ye want wi' one o' my employees?" he demanded, his eyes twinkling.

Marion blushed to the roots of her hair, and, "Lucky lad," said Clement Harper to himself.

"It's—it's private," said unhappy Marion, hot and miserable.

"Nae doubt. Sit ye down a minute, young lady. I've something t' say t' ye—an' then, if ye wish, I'll take ye to the quayside myself."

Marion sat obediently, and Harper walked up and down the room in front of her. At last he came to rest before her chair, and stood still, looking at her gravely.

"Have ye known him long?" he asked. "Forgie me askin'—I'm old enough to be your father."

"About a month," Marion answered, her eyes downcast, the long lashes lying on her flushed cheeks.

"And of that month he's been a fortnight

away from ye. D'ye know where he's been?"

"To—to Iceland, hasn't he?"

"Who told ye?"

"His friend, Mr. Dwyer."

"Ah!" He became preternaturally grave. "D'ye know, I feel it's my duty to tell ye that Laurence Averil is one of the roughest men in my employ?"

The little chin came out obstinately as she looked slowly up at him, and her eyes settled on his face.

"He's a wild, foul-mouthed, drunken ne'er-do-weel. Never a man in the fleet but's afraid o' him—the drivin', man-killin' sweater. He's a——"

But Marion was on her feet, quivering with anger. "He's a *man*," she said. "And that's more than can be said of you, saying such vile things behind his back. I hate you—and what's more, if—if Laurence Averil had horns and a tail I'd marry him. There!" She stamped her foot and swung round to the door. She had her hand on the handle before Harper's shout of laughter made her pause.

"Eh, eh!" he cried, his fat sides shaking. "Forgie's, Miss Stewart. We old folks must have our joke. But oh! if that's the way ye mean to treat dour Laurence, yours'll be a

peaceful household, I'm thinkin'. Where's my hat?'' Before Marion had recovered from her surprise, they were descending the narrow ways to the Fish Quay together.

On the road he told her of his early connection with her own story—of the sale by him of the lands to Laurence's father. ''And have ye sold all yon shares?'' he asked.

''Some of them.''

''Which?''

''The ordinary shares. I've still got the debentures.''

''They'll come nicely to paper a room wi','' he told her. ''Ye've seen your last profit from that company. Well, ye got rid o' th' ordinaries. That's one service Laurie's done ye. And here's another.''—He told her of the episode of the fire-box on his last trip, and her breath came quick with pride and love at the thought of his daring and suffering in her cause. ''And now here's the Fish Quay, and yonder's Laurence. I've work to attend to elsewhere, and ye can go and announce yourself.''

Laurence stood with his back to her amid a busy knot of men and women. Great piles of newly caught fish lay around their feet, and a man standing by his side was selling them by auction. She watched him for some time.

Occasionally, as he turned to nod to the salesman, she caught a view of his profile. It seemed stern and forbidding, but at length, taking her courage in both hands, she picked her way between the heaps of fish, and touched him on the arm.

He turned over his shoulder to see who was behind him. She saw him catch his lip in his teeth at recognition, and he backed an order to two men, carrying a great basket between them, with an oath that made them jump.

Then, over his shoulder, "Do you want me?" he asked curtly.

"Yes," she told him. He turned and walked back with her to the edge of the clamorous circle, and stood there, his eyes still upon the men who were bringing up and emptying the harvest of the seas upon the stones.

"Yes?" he said, and waited for her to begin. He never looked at her.

"I—I've sold the ordinary shares," she announced timidly.

"Only the ordinaries. Why didn't you sell the debentures?"

"I haven't tried. I'm afraid it's too late now."

"Tchk, tchk." He clicked his tongue with annoyance. "What did you get for the others?"

"Sixteen hundred pounds."

"Good!" He nodded approval, but still he looked away, and they were both silent for a while.

She broke the silence. "I've spent a hundred of it already," she said.

"Yes?"

"Yes. In—in a trousseau. I—I'm going to get married."

He made no answer. She saw his shoulders heave with the deep breath he took as his back came round towards her.

All he had ever heard of women's cruelty raced into his brain. Olden legends of gladiatorial fights in the arena, watched by the languid ladies of old Rome—tales of the Spanish

bull-ring of the present day, where there were more mantillas than sombreros in the circles of seats around the filthy butchery. Oh, cruel, cruel beast of a woman! This was worse than he had ever conceived. However ill he had behaved, nothing could justify this deliberate torture as punishment. Could women know the pain they gave? Was it true that they bore suffering better than men, because they were themselves incapable of keen feeling?

Again her hand touched his arm, and her shaking voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"Don't—don't you want to know who it is?" she asked.

"No." His voice was harsh and hoarse.

"O-oh." The touch upon his arm became a timorous squeeze, and he turned towards her in consternation. Was she ill? he wondered.

But her lips were smiling, though her eyes were full of tears. Beneath their wet and fluttering lashes they looked bravely into his own. And—"And must I ask you myself, then, Laurence Averil?" she said.